

Boxes

UNBOXING THE STATUS QUO



SM
GIRLY
TER

ARTSY

NERD

FUNNY

SPOILED

LAZY

PRETTY

DUMB

WHITE

SLUT



LOCKDOWN
LONELINESS
IS PORN MAKING
YOU INSECURE?
BLACK MUSLIM
RAPPERS ON #BLM

**CHIMAMANDA
NGOZI ADICHIE**

“THE SINGLE STORY
CREATES STEREOTYPES
AND THE PROBLEM WITH
STEREOTYPES IS NOT
THAT THEY ARE UNTRUE,
BUT THAT THEY ARE
INCOMPLETE. THEY MAKE
ONE STORY BECOME THE
ONLY STORY”

This magazine may tackle difficult topics. If you are struggling with any of these issues or need help, reach out to a parent, a friend, a school counsellor or an adult you trust, call a local helpline or go to [tele-onthaal.be](https://www.tele-onthaal.be) (from Belgium).

In dit magazine lees je mogelijk over moeilijke onderwerpen. Als je met deze problemen worstelt of hulp nodig hebt, praat dan met een ouder, een vriend, een schoolbegeleider of een volwassene die je vertrouwt, bel een lokale hulplijn of ga naar [tele-onthaal.be](https://www.tele-onthaal.be) (vanuit België).

Boxes

Staff

EDITORS

Nelke Roose &
Yannick Verbesselt

COLLAGES

Nelke Roose &
Yannick Verbesselt

SUPPORT TEAM

Lieve Roegiers
Sandra Busselot
Leen Creve

COVER

Model: Sophie Deforce
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Nelke Roose

PRESS

2PrintiT Mechelen

IMAGES

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**YOU
ARE
WORTH
IT**

hug
YOURSELF

**GOOD
THINGS
ARE
COMING
YOUR
WAY**

**YES
YOU
CAN**

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THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Summer is slowly ending and most of you are going back to school. Some are even going to college or university to whom we want to say congratulations and wish good luck. Whatever you do, you'll soon be washing your hands a lot, looking forward to a normal lockdown free summer and in class, you'll be surrounded again by people your age. Some classic high school advice you may have heard to get you through the year: stay away from the jocks and be sure to ask the nerd for help.

Did you ever realise how often you put your classmates into boxes? Maybe you thought popular kids never felt lonely, but guess what, that is not the case, see **page 42**. Or take a teen mom for example, we're quick to assume she sleeps around and had an accident, but Mekayla on **page 21** deliberately chose to become a mom at age 14. Everyone thinks in stereotypes and that is okay, as we found out on **page 9**. It's just a problem when you use stereotypes to discriminate against others.

We, Nelke and Yannick, wanted to bring you this magazine because there are no other magazines today exclusively written for you. Other media outlets and adults put you in a box by thinking you're simply not interested in more serious topics

or they assume you just stopped reading completely. We couldn't believe that and proved them wrong on **page 34** with the 18 teenage journalists who write for the political platform Revolution Now in hopes to change the world.

Making this magazine helped us to shove some of our old ideas aside. If we were allowed to make one wish, aside from great points, we'd hope these stories help you break free from some of the boxes you think in. Broadening your horizon pays off. Get to know others by asking them for their preferred pronouns. Find out why that is important on **page 37**. Travel, when it's safe again. Start conversations. Really listen. Get to know the story of black, female, Muslim rappers on **page 58** or take on our challenge to change your life by watching 3 old coming-of-age movies, more on that on **page 52**.

Instead of the old classic advice, we'd rather tell you that thinking outside the box pays off. Perhaps, the jock you needed to stay away from, can become an awesome friend and maybe the nerd you asked for help wasn't so good at school after all.

Good luck and enjoy our magazine.



Yannick
(HE / HIM)



Nelke
(SHE / HER)

IN THE BOX

HEAD

- 9 Stereotypes explained
- 10 Why do we struggle with low self-esteem?
- 13 Therapy app researched
- 17 Your deepest secrets
- 20 Short news on mental health

PRIVATE LIFE

- 21 “I chose to become a mom at fourteen”
- 24 Life after lockdown captured
- 29 “I got high just to be able to breathe”

GLOBE

- 32 Checklist: 8 ways to save the climate
- 34 Portraits of four teen journalists
- 37 There’s more than ‘he’ and ‘she’

LOVERS AND FRIENDS

- 41 Why loneliness should be talked about
- 44 FAQs: porn, vaginas and penises
- 48 Our experience: when a gay and lesbian fall in love with each other

CULTURE

- 50 Crossword puzzle
- 51 6 podcasts that break boxes
- 52 3 life-changing films
- 53 Argentinian illustrator about a creative career
- 56 Pictured: Boxes joined pop & rock camp
- 58 Black, Muslim female rappers Aint Afraid open up







WHAT ARE STEREOTYPES?

“BECOME AWARE OF HOW YOU THINK ABOUT OTHERS”

We all put people in boxes. **Girls are bad at maths, boys in arts are gay and rich kids are spoiled.** Heard of any of these stereotypes? We're used to think in clichés, but when does it become problematic?  3 MIN

© CARMEN VAN PUYENBROECK



Carmen Van Puyenbroeck has been working at Unia for more than five years. Unia is the Belgian Centre for Equal Opportunities and Fight against Racism.

“Stereotypes are part of everyone”, explains Carmen Van Puyenbroeck. “There is an overload of information coming our way, too much for us to handle. And so our brain has a cognitive function to translate all the information we receive through our senses. Thinking in boxes helps us navigate and understand the world better.” After all, we can't analyse every person.

WHY DO WE USE STEREOTYPES?

“Stereotypes aren't bad, as long as you're aware they are not the full truth”, says Van Puyenbroeck. Perhaps, you know some girls who aren't good at maths. However, it would be wrong to assume all girls suck at it. According to a Canadian study from 2018, there barely is a difference in how Canadian boys and girls perform at children's maths in elementary school.

Stereotypes become problematic when you start using them to judge something or someone, as this leads to discrimination. Van Puyenbroeck: “In other words, prejudices appear when we attach moral values to these stereotypes which could make you treat people differently. You

can think or feel whatever you want, but you must treat everyone the same way, that's the law.” For example, it wouldn't be right to shut out girls from your friend group because you assume they are all dumb.

WHAT'S SO DANGEROUS ABOUT STEREOTYPES?

Psychologists warn for the stereotype threat: if you're a girl and you've always heard that boys are better at maths, it's easy to start believing that. “When you doubt yourself, you get lower grades than you actually could.”

“If one of your parents is a surgeon, people automatically assume you're the best in your class. And so you probably try your best to live up to those expectations, resulting in good grades. But when one of your parents works in a factory, you will never be challenged the same way, resulting in lesser grades”, shares Van Puyenbroeck.

HOW TO STOP THINKING IN STEREOTYPES?

Breaking with stereotypes can be very difficult, changing our thoughts is hard. “The first step is becoming aware of how you think about certain people.” A first step you can take is broadening your world. Try making contact with people you normally don't speak to but have certain ideas about. Talk to that one

classmate you've never spoken to. The internet is a great place to find peers with other backgrounds, beliefs, cultures and sexualities.

HOW CAN YOU STAND UP IF PEOPLE PUT YOU IN A BOX?

Van Puyenbroeck: “If you are discriminated against, it's always good to find other people who share your story. There are many organisations, like the Belgian KifKif (based in Antwerp ed.), which support teens and fight against discrimination.”

And what about online abuse? “You never have to reply to haters on social media, just do whatever you feel comfortable with. If you reply, always do so with facts.” So, are you called dumb because you're a girl? Go look up some data to prove that it doesn't make sense.

To summarise, thinking in stereotypes isn't bad unless you use these boxes to discriminate people. Try to become aware of how your thoughts work and how they impact others. •

If you are a victim of discrimination, you can file a report with Unia at **0800 12 800** (from Belgium) or on Unia's website. Even if you don't want to press charges, the issues must be known and registered, shares Van Puyenbroeck.

Want to know more about stereotype threat? Go to **page 51** and discover a podcast on this topic.





LOW SELF-ESTEEM IN WORDS BY THE AUTHOR OF
'THE ULTIMATE SELF-ESTEEM WORKBOOK FOR TEENS'

WHY YOU OFTEN DON'T BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

There's pressure to be like this, talk like that, fit in with others. When we don't meet those criteria, **we are harsh on ourselves**, shares Megan MacCutcheon (39). MacCutcheon has worked for more than ten years as a licensed professional counsellor in Virginia (USA) and published three self-help books.

🕒 3 MIN



© SUSAN FLANDRO PHOTOGRAPHY

BOXES: Quite an expert we have here today. Tell us, why is being confident often an issue as a teen?

MacCutcheon: “As a little kid, you just want to play and everything is great. But then you get a bit older and you start comparing yourself to peers and unrealistic standards in the media. ‘You wonder: Who am I? How do I fit in? Am I okay?’ Suddenly, you care about the opinions of others.”

BOXES: Why is believing in yourself crucial?

MacCutcheon: “Confidence helps you navigate in life. For example, when you are taking a quiz at school, are you confident and do you think: ‘I’m going to do okay’? Or do you think: ‘Oh my gosh, this is going to fail’? Having that confidence makes taking a test just a bit easier.”

BOXES: There seems to be a lot of negative self-talk.

MacCutcheon: “Yeah, there are many causes why we talk ourselves down. As humans, we often focus on negativity. Some scientists believe this goes back to cavemen times, where humans had to focus on the negative to not get eaten by a bear.”

BOXES: But negativity does not just come from cavemen, right?

MacCutcheon: “Well, most parents are doing the best they can, however, sometimes teens hear their parents being critical of themselves. Think about

your parents or grandparents, did you hear them say: ‘Oh, I’m smart. I can take this!’ or did you hear them say ‘I’m such an idiot, I messed up’? Hearing those messages makes a difference.”

BOXES: We often don’t learn to be kind to ourselves.

MacCutcheon: “All teens could use some tools to build self-esteem. It would be so great if schools taught these better, at least

“YOU NEVER STOP BUILDING YOURSELF UP”

in America. If we were being taught to speak kindly to ourselves and not care so much about others’ opinions, things would go smoother.”

BOXES: Would it also help to stop thinking in boxes?

MacCutcheon: “Of course! There are these boxes or should be’s, as I call them. People start thinking: ‘I should be this. I should think like this or talk that.’ Those ideas get them into trouble because it’s not always possible to meet those criteria. So you should be able to think outside the box.”

BOXES: Did you experience these insecurities yourself as a teen?

MacCutcheon: “Good question! I always think about how I wish I could go back to my high school days. I’d love to spend a

few days there again with the confidence I have now. Back then, I was terribly shy and would have never dared to do an interview like the one we are doing (laughs).”

BOXES: What’s the best advice you could give teens?

MacCutcheon: “Just know you’re not alone or weird for feeling insecure. I see a lack of confidence with so many people in my office, not just teens but also adults. You never stop building yourself up and working on your confidence. It’s not something we learn and know, it’s something we work on all the time.”

BOXES: So, confidence takes a long time.

MacCutcheon: “You have to be willing to make the effort to work on yourself. I know teens are busy with pressure from school, home and social life, activities and even jobs. Improving your self-esteem could easily feel like a lot of extra work, yet it’s so important and it will take you so far into your adulthood.” •

WONDERING HOW GOOD YOUR SELF-ESTEEM IS? DO THE TEST ON THE NEXT PAGE. →

SEND SOME POSITIVITY TO PEOPLE YOU LOVE WITH THE POSTCARDS YOU FIND AT THE START OF THE MAGAZINE.

TEST: IS YOUR SELF-ESTEEM (UN)HEALTHY?

In MacCutcheon's book, she makes you take a moment to think about some statements on unhealthy self-esteem. We selected a few for you: how many can you relate to?

UNHEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM

- I CARE A LOT ABOUT WHAT OTHERS THINK OF ME
- I FREQUENTLY DOUBT MYSELF
- I WANT OR NEED TO BE PERFECT
- I OFTEN FEEL LIKE I AM TOO MUCH
- I APOLOGIZE FOR THINGS I DON'T NEED TO... SORRY
- I HAVE DIFFICULTY RELYING ON OTHERS OR ASKING FOR HELP
- I NEED OTHERS TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF
- I COMPARE MYSELF TO OTHERS
- I FIND IT HARD TO SPEAK UP FOR MYSELF
- I AM THE WORST AT TAKING COMPLIMENTS, IT MAKES ME UNCOMFORTABLE



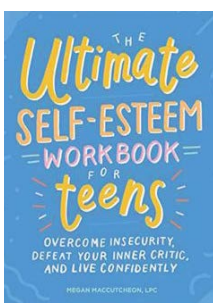
Relating to these statements could be a sign that you don't believe in your own worth or don't truly accept who you are. By recognizing that you may struggle with low self-esteem, as MacCutcheon also says, you are taking a first step into overcoming your insecurities.

HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM



- I BELIEVE I AM WORTHY
- I CAN BE PROUD OF WHAT I ACHIEVE
- I AM OKAY WITH IMPERFECTIONS
- I DON'T NEED TO PROVE MYSELF TO ANYONE
- I CAN MAKE MY OWN DECISIONS AND CHOICES: I THINK FOR MYSELF
- I CAN STAND UP FOR MYSELF
- I AM ABLE TO HANDLE CRITICISM
- I CAN ASK FOR HELP WHEN I NEED IT
- I CAN SET BOUNDARIES AND LIMITS
- I ACCEPT MY FLAWS AND WEAKNESSES

Give yourself a pat on the back for any checks you made on this list. As MacCutcheon explained, being confident isn't always easy, but can make life a lot more comfortable.



Want to know more? Buy the book online!

NOTE THAT THIS TEST ISN'T A WAY TO DIAGNOSE YOU WITH ANY MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES YOU MAY HAVE. IF YOU ARE STRUGGLING, YOU COULD CONTACT YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELLOR OR SOMEONE YOU TRUST WHO WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH FURTHER HELP.

THERAPY FROM HOME

THERAPY APP TEENCOUNSELING INVESTIGATED

Taboo already makes it hard to seek help if you're struggling with your mental health. Add a coronavirus pandemic to the mix and reaching a therapist becomes even more difficult. But can therapy apps be the out of the box solution?

10 MIN

1. WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Do a search for 'therapy apps' on Google and Betterhelp will be one of your top search results. With BetterHelp, people can get help from licensed therapists via chat or video calls on their computer, tablet or smartphone. The service is owned by the American multinational Teladoc Health Inc., which brings medical help via mobile devices, the internet and telephones.

If the name BetterHelp already sounds familiar to you, it might be from the

numerous YouTube advertorials and sponsorships available at the moment. Some of your favourite YouTubers like Shane Dawson, Elle Mills and Bobby Burns have been sponsored by the app.

Its network is huge: since the birth of Betterhelp in 2013, it reached more than 1.090.838 people through the help it provides. It also has a sister platform, specifically made for teenagers between 13 and 19 years old, called TeenCounseling. And that's the platform we look into.

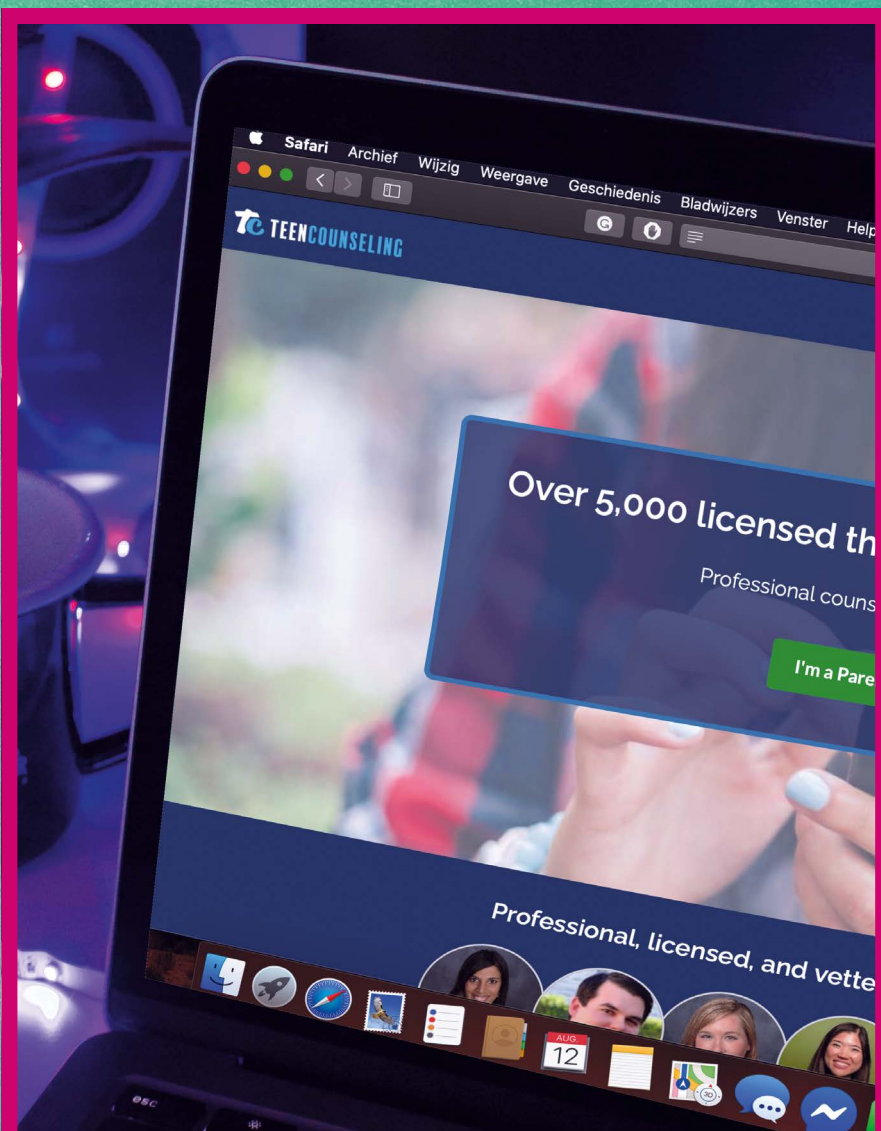
2. WHO ARE THE THERAPISTS?

According to the fine print in the FAQ's on TeenCounseling's website, the app works with licensed, trained, experienced psychologists, marriage and family therapists, clinical social workers and professional counsellors. Luckily, no one can pretend to be one of the above, because they need to have a Master's or Doctoral degree in a relevant field. Besides that, they should have at least three years of experience and a thousand hours hands-on-experience.

How TeenCounseling screens the therapists and checks if they have the required experience remains unclear to us or other users. But it is important to note that these counsellors or therapists are not employees of the app but independent mental health providers. Furthermore, the counsellors have to accept a lengthy list of agreements: everything they do is at their own risk, they have to follow all the rules, laws and regulations.

3. FOR WHAT CAN YOU USE TEENCOUNSELING?

According to their website, TeenCounseling can help with an impressive list of things: anxiety, stress, self-esteem, depression, bullying, anger, eating disorders and other mental challenges. It is important to note, however, →



TeenCounseling states that you shouldn't use the app if you are in a crisis or in danger, if you are considering self-harm or dealing with a severe mental illness like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. TeenCounseling explicitly forbids its counsellors from providing help for these mental illnesses, as these problems require in-person meetings with a professional.

Despite what they claim, in most articles about schizophrenia on BetterHelp's website, the platform links to its own service as a treatment for symptoms of schizophrenia. One article entitled 'Everything You Need To Know About DSM-V Schizophrenia' ends in: "If you are dealing with a DSM-V Schizophrenia diagnosis, BetterHelp is there for you today!"

TESTIMONY OF A USER

Which problems can be treated via the app and which cannot is blurry, according to a female, American user we contacted through Twitter. She recently tried out BetterHelp, TeenCounseling's "big sister", but wants to remain anonymous.

"I was struggling with anxiety. I would overthink and be worried about the next bad thing that could happen. I wasn't bipolar or suicidal or anything like that. I was just looking to learn new calming coping mechanisms and find someone to talk this stuff out with."

"On their website and other platforms they advertise that anyone can sign up regardless

of what they're going through. However, when I got my therapist, she refused to talk to me because she said my situation was 'too serious.' I felt so disappointed. But can you imagine being someone who is suicidal and getting rejected like that by a therapist who is supposed to help you? Crazy."

Despite the experience this user had, there are plenty of other reviews to be found online of users who found the service helpful. "It helps and saves lives. TeenCounseling can be for anyone and it can be used in any way. I use it specifically for my anxiety and depression." It seems your experience depends on the therapist you get assigned.

4. WHAT ARE (DIS)ADVANTAGES OF THERAPY VIA APPS?

We discussed this question with Natalie De Schepper, a clinical psychologist from Antwerp who focuses on children and youth. "A therapy app could make mental help more accessible for teens, which is a huge advantage", says De Schepper. "Teenagers may find it easier to open up about emotions or embarrassing things via an app." That is because it can feel safer to talk from behind a screen.

But De Schepper doesn't think an app can replace face-to-face therapy. "I think therapy via apps can be hard because the personal contact of being together in the same room is lacking. When you talk to someone online, you may misunderstand what they mean", something we have all experienced when texting friends.

Important note from TeenCounseling itself: online counselling should not in any way be considered a substitute for in-person counselling. As De Schepper confirms: "Online therapy can help teens get things off their chest and can complement or support existing face-to-face therapy, but online therapy cannot replace face-to-face therapy."



5. IS YOUR PERSONAL DATA SAFE WHEN YOU USE THE APP?

When you sign up, you need to fill in some information about yourself. A few questions are basic such as your gender, age and the issues you face, but some are a lot more personal. For example, what the relationship with your parents is like, if and when you last seriously considered suicide and what your living situation is like. To us, and hopefully to you too, these raise a lot of questions about privacy. What does TeenCounseling do with all of your information and how is it stored?

“A good way for you as a user to investigate how your personal information is kept safe, is to see if they transfer your data to somewhere else. It’s important to know who ends up with your data, where it is stored and to whom you can ask for information”, says Sara Roda, privacy expert from Portugal who’s now an affiliated researcher at the LSTS department of the Free University of Brussels (VUB). Reading a long privacy policy can be boring, we know, but it is always recommended.

“We typically surf on the internet and just accept terms and conditions without reading them. But try to be critical

and look at what is happening with your personal information. You will be surprised.”

KIDS’ INFORMATION

“For me, a lot can go wrong when you create a profile for children or teens. It’s something you always have to be careful about. We can’t always know how the information will be used in the future”, says Sara.

Imagine that a future employer or an insurance company could access what you have told your counsellor ten years ago. One way teens are protected from violations in their privacy, is that parents need to give their consent to TeenCounseling, no matter how young they are. In this way TeenCounseling complies with the GDPR.

The GDPR or the General Data Protection Regulation is a long list of rules the European Union has put together to protect personal data. Every company which gathers and stores EU citizens’ information has to follow those rules. Websites and apps almost always save your personal data. Most of the time it’s to make the app work better for you, but

you should remain cautious of the information you give about yourself.

LIMITED DATA COLLECTION

“Since this is about processing health data of minors on the internet, the users are particularly vulnerable. Companies need to be especially attentive how they collect and use this sensitive information.” One of the key rules within GDPR is that companies can’t gather more information than the minimum required. “An app can’t just collect your location data if that’s not needed for the app to work. Another aspect is purpose limitation: the app can only use your personal data for the purpose it announced. The app shouldn’t collect data that is not needed.”

In order to ensure that apps don’t collect too much data, companies need to appoint a so-called data protection officer. It’s one person or a team within the company that is responsible for following the GDPR. TeenCounseling appointed an EU representative data protection officer, located in Spain, as mentioned in their privacy policy. →



6. WHAT ARE THE (DIS) ADVANTAGES OF THERAPY VIA APPS?

One of the more important aspects of talking to your doctor or a health care provider is confidentiality. That means that your doctor or therapist can't just go around talking about what you said. Your problems are kept secret in the app, but TeenCounseling will inform parents and/or authorities in some serious cases. For example, when you're thinking about suicide or when the life of someone else is in danger.

DATA FOR ADS

Your personal data, like your age or where you live, could be sold or shared with other websites. It's something that often happens between Google and social media for ads. Remember when you were last looking for white sneakers online and suddenly there are ads

of online shoe stores everywhere? "If an app is transferring data to third-parties, it needs to be clear what kind of purpose that transfer relates to."

When looking at TeenCounseling's privacy policy, it is not initially clear if they are selling data for ad-related purposes. They do say that your information may be used to personalize your website experience and to deliver content and product and service offerings related to your interests, including targeted offers and ads through their websites, third-party websites and via email or text message. Sara: "A question that then arises, is whether this marketing is ethical. You can't advertise to anxious or depressed teens and take advantage of their vulnerable situation."

7. IS TEENCOUNSELING A CHEAPER ALTERNATIVE?

One week of counselling will cost your parents or you 60 euros per week, but the fee will be charged monthly. Although on their website TeenCounseling states that the service is more affordable than face-to-face therapy, the reality is a bit more complex.

Firstly, it is unclear how much time you are allowed to spend talking to your counsellor weekly. The chat room is available at any time, but how fast and how many times your counsellor responds to you depends on who you get assigned to. TeenCounseling also promises that you can schedule a weekly phone or video chat but again, for how long you can then talk to your counsellor is something we can't say.

In Belgium, psychologists are free to decide how much they charge per session. This usually depends on their experience. On average, the cost of 60 minutes with a psychologist ranges between 50 and 60 euros. However, part of that fee could be refunded later depending on which health insurance you have and what your situation is. So here in Belgium, we estimate that the cost of BetterHelp will be about the same as and in some instances even higher than in-office therapy sessions with a psychologist. •

IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES YOURSELF, YOU COULD CONTACT YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELLOR OR AN ADULT YOU TRUST. THERE ARE ALSO MANY ORGANISATIONS ONLINE THAT CAN HELP YOU. GO TO TELE-ONTHAAL.BE (FROM BELGIUM) TO FIND A SUITABLE LOCAL HELPLINE.



Boxes reached out to TeenCounseling twice, without hearing back from the company.

YOUR DEEPEST SECRETS

What if you could look into someone else's head from a different box and find out what keeps them up at night?



EVERYONE THINKS I'M SUPER INNOCENT, BUT I'M TOTALLY NOT.

· MALE, 17, BELGIUM



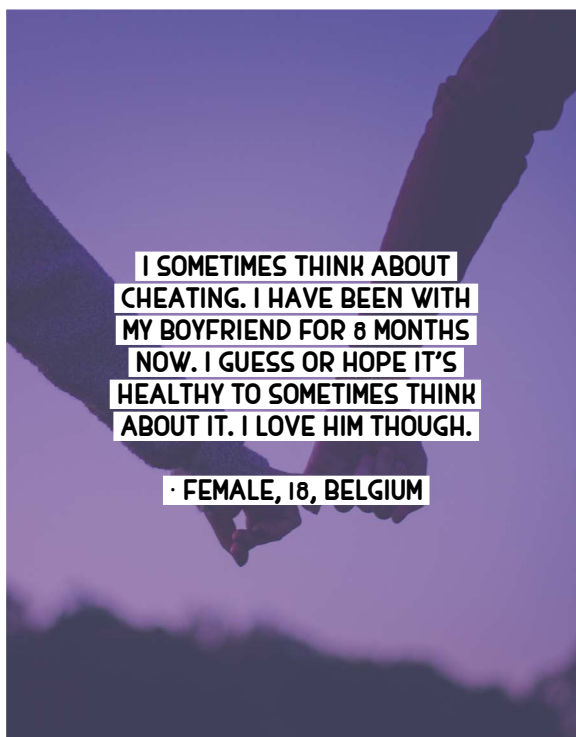
I KNOW WHO I AM, IT'S JUST THAT I DON'T KNOW WHO I FALL IN LOVE WITH.

· FEMALE, 17, BELGIUM



I'M AFRAID OF MY OWN DAD.

· FEMALE 16, BELGIUM



I SOMETIMES THINK ABOUT CHEATING. I HAVE BEEN WITH MY BOYFRIEND FOR 8 MONTHS NOW. I GUESS OR HOPE IT'S HEALTHY TO SOMETIMES THINK ABOUT IT. I LOVE HIM THOUGH.

· FEMALE, 18, BELGIUM



I AM REALLY STRESSED AND SCARED BECAUSE I MAY BE ADDICTED TO MEDICATION TO SUPPRESS MY EMOTIONS.

· FEMALE 16, BELGIUM





SNAPCHAT LAUNCHES NEW FUNCTION FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Snapchat launched a new function called Here for you, to provide Snapchatters with links to information and exercises to help with mental health issues.

Originally, the social media app Snapchat announced its mental health tool in February to come "in the upcoming months". With the COVID-19 outbreak, the app decided to release the function sooner.

To make it easier for you to talk about mental health, Snapchat will also be bringing new original shows on the Discover page. The app already has mobile shows like Mind Yourself, which follows other teenagers with mental health issues and Chill Pill, a series of short videos to reduce anxiety.



LOCKDOWN WAS ESPECIALLY DAMAGING FOR YOU

Teens could experience more mental health problems because of lockdown, warn researchers of the University of Cambridge, UK. That is because young people, between 10 and 24 years old, normally spend more time with friends than with family.

Face-to-face contact with friends is key for the development of your brains. But with the COVID-19 pandemic, we were all at home for months, and so left without friends and school. On top of that, teens have reached an age when mental-health issues usually develop. Luckily, social media made it possible to still be in contact with your friends, but it's too soon to say how much it made up for the negative effects of social distancing.

RELAX WITH BINAURAL BEATS

Did you know there are Spotify and YouTube playlists that supposedly help you calm down? These songs are called binaural beats and should have a calming, stress-reducing effect on your brain. When listening with earphones a different frequency is played in each ear, making your brain produce a third sound. We know it sounds confusing but according to a 2019 review of 22 studies there is a significant link between the sounds and reduced anxiety. Check out our favourites in our playlist on Spotify.



SCAN ME

Want to know more about the impact of lockdown on our well-being? Go to [page 51](#) to discover a podcast on this topic.

1/5

American teenagers report to feel more stressed when they don't sleep long enough, according to a survey of the American Psychology Association. Generally, teens between 14 and 17 years old need around 8 to 10 hours of sleep.





© ERYN COWCHER

“I CHOSE TO BECOME A MOM AT 14”

A TIMELINE OF A TEEN MOM'S LIFE

5 MIN

“Being a teen mom is the end of your life. That’s the stereotype around teen moms, but it’s not how it always goes”, shares teen mom Mekayla Cowcher Penn. The Australian fifteen-year-old still takes classes, has high ambitions and hangs out with friends her age, “but I just have to bring a baby”, she laughs.

→

Want to see more of Mekayla? Hop over to our Instagram ([@boxesmag](#)) & watch Mekayla answering most Googled questions about teen pregnancies.

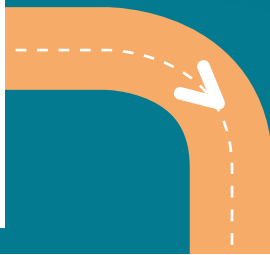
ACTING OUT

At fourteen years old, Mekayla had been dating her 15-year-old boyfriend for six months when they chose to get pregnant.

“In Year 7*, I was bullied really bad and made a lot of enemies at school.” A year later, Mekayla hit puberty and started acting out. She became friends with the ‘bad kids’ at school: “I was probably one of

the worst students, doing all the naughty stuff, like being extremely rude to teachers.”

And that’s when she met her boyfriend who was involved with drugs. “My mom and I were fighting and she didn’t approve of our relationship at all. **I wanted to move in with him, so that’s why we decided to have a baby.**”



TELLING MOM

When Mekayla told her mom the day after she took the test, her mom got extremely scared. “She was disappointed that I had gone and done that. The scariest part for her was that she didn’t see a future for me anymore.” Mekayla guesses that her reaction came from the whole stigma around teen pregnancies. “People think it’s the end of your life and you’ve got nothing else left. **You’re put into the box of a pregnant teenager and that’s all you’ll ever be.**”



TAKING THE TEST

After trying for only a few weeks, Mekayla was pregnant. “When I took the pregnancy test at my boyfriend’s house with his stepmom, **I had to pretend I was in shock.** No one knew that we were trying for a baby, because that would have gotten us into even more trouble.”

BREAKING UP

“Shortly after I told my mom, my boyfriend also got scared. He changed his mind and decided that **he didn’t want to be a dad anymore. He just told me to get an abortion.**” And even though Mekayla isn’t against abortion, she couldn’t do it for herself. That’s why they broke up and cut off all contact.



GROWING UP

“When you realise there’s a life growing inside of you, you need to grow up fast and change your ways.” In just two months, Mekayla became a better person for herself, her daughter and her family. After two months of anger, fear and sadness, Mekayla’s mother came around and became supportive: “I think seeing the ultrasound soothed her in a way because she realised she was going to have a grandchild. Before, I was in a very bad place mentally, but things completely turned. That’s why **I always say that my daughter saved my life.**”



Australia’s schooling system counts the years like this: There are primary schools, secondary schools, also called high schools, and universities and colleges. Kids stay in primary school from Year 1 to Year 6 and usually at the age of twelve, they go to high school from Year 7 until Year 12.

FITTING IN AS A PARENT AND A TEEN

Emma Thielens from the Belgian pregnancy organisation **Fara** explains: “When becoming a teen mom or dad, there are obviously some consequences. Teens are seeking who they want to become as a person by experimenting, spending time with friends and having hobbies. There are conflicting priorities: being young as

well as being a parent. You grow as a parent but your own self-development often gets put on hold. We often hear that teen parents feel they cannot fit the box: too ‘young’ to be a parent but too ‘old’ to be a teen. So, it is important to find others who went through the same.”

GOING OUT WITH A BELLY

Although it was a healthy pregnancy, Mekayla found being pregnant quite difficult. “Going out in public with a belly was one of the hardest things I’ve had to deal with. I was so scared of what people were going to think or say.”

“Random strangers would come up to me and tell me to get rid of my child as soon as she’d be born because it would ruin my life.” Others told her that she was too young to be pregnant or that she should have gotten an abortion. Why would anyone react that way? **“People automatically think you must be a slut.** Like when my old classmates found out, I got called all the words under the sun. They think there’s nothing else to you anymore.”



© ERYN COWCHER

RUDE NURSE

After being in labour for 29 long hours, Mekayla gave birth to a girl called Kaisley, on 18 September 2019. Mekayla describes it as the best day of her life.

But it wasn’t all rainbows and pink clouds. She gave birth in a public hospital, where you don’t have just one midwife or nurse the entire time, but get whoever

who is on shift. And one of those nurses, an older lady, was shocked to see Mekayla and was rude to her: “I was in a lot of pain - I didn’t have any medication at all - and **she told me that I didn’t belong there,** that I should be at home, giving birth all alone. Luckily, she went off shift and I got another kinder nurse, yet it was still horrible.”

LIFE TODAY

“When I took Kaisley home from the hospital, I was extremely stressed and didn’t know what to do.” Because Mekayla was still young, child protection services got involved, which put a lot of pressure on her. “I needed to constantly watch what I was doing to **prove them that I could be a good mother.**”

Mekayla still lives at home today with her mom and feels grateful to rely on her for help. However, she

points out that it isn’t always easy having two mothers in the same house. “My mom has a very different parenting style than I do. I’m strict and like to have a routine, where my mom is more laid-back.”

“I regret who I had my daughter with. But I don’t regret getting pregnant. I don’t regret being such a rebel in school, because only then I realized I desperately needed to change.”

FUTURE

Mekayla continued her classes at an online school and she’s currently in year ten. “Combining a baby with school is difficult, but luckily my teacher and school are relaxed with it. When I need to attend on my child, they are okay with that and make time for me the next day.”

At 12 years old, Mekayla joined a modeling agency. Because of the pregnancy, she stopped for a year. “Now, I am back and my agency is extremely supportive. I can bring my daughter and she can crawl on the floor.

“Overall, I enjoy being a mom. But for now, I want to wait until marriage to have more kids.” As other teens Makayla’s age don’t want big responsibilities, dating as a single teen mom just doesn’t work, she says. Makayla does love having those responsibilities of being a parent but still gets nasty looks. “People stare at me with disgust. Every time, I have to ignore them and keep on walking.” That doesn’t stop her from speaking up: **“I have to prove to them that becoming a teen mom doesn’t mean it’s over.”** •





© NELKE ROOSE

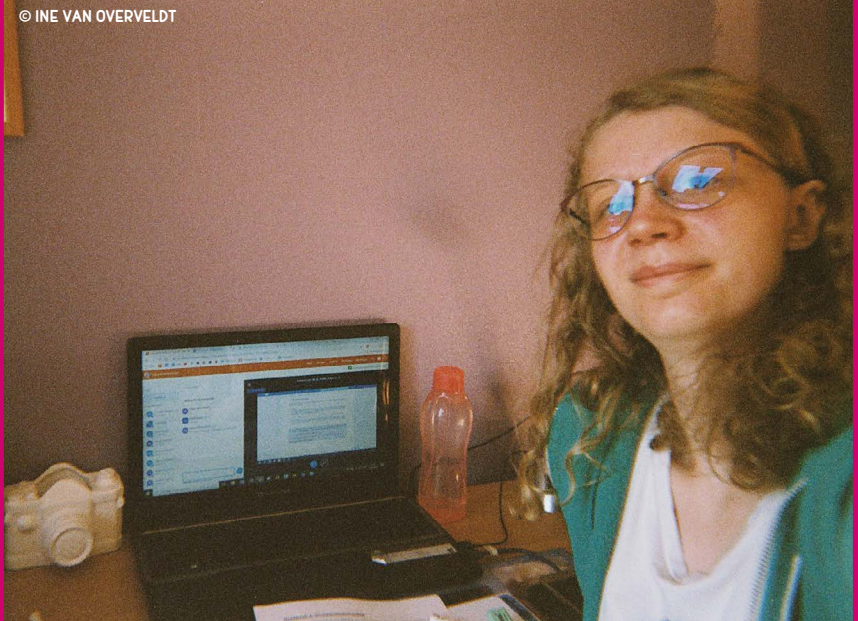
“SOME CRAZY PANDEMIC MESSED UP ALL MY PLANS”

🕒 5 MIN

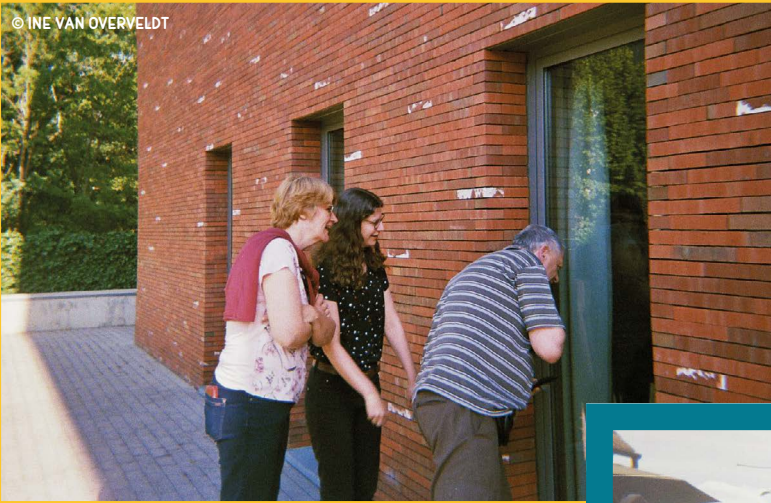
When coronavirus measures started to loosen, we gave one teen a disposable camera to capture what life was like for them. Belgian student Ine van Overveldt (18) from Herent pictured her life and senior year at school, slowly leaving the isolating box that her home had become.



“This was the first picture I took. We started making our facemasks to go outside safely. I was already good at sewing, so I took this opportunity to make more than 30 face masks for family and friends. Quite a job!”



“I missed my classmates. We couldn’t see or talk to each other during online classes, like my maths class in this photo. If we had a question, we needed to send a message. The teacher no idea if you understood everything. Luckily, each week, we had a class meeting with everyone, where we at least could hear each other. That made everything slightly more normal again.”



“Here, we were visiting my 88-year old grandmother in Limburg. At grandma’s retirement home, 14 out of 16 people from her corridor got infected with the coronavirus. Luckily, grandmother was fine, but we couldn’t visit her like we usually would. So we spoke over the phone while we saw each other through her window”.



My grandpa celebrated his 80th birthday in lockdown. We could start visiting family again so we threw him a coronaproof party, as you can see by the distance between the tables. Missing our family and friends was the hardest thing about the lockdown. →



© INE VAN OVERVELDT

May 15th: The grand return to school. We had to wash our hands so much. When we entered, before and after breaks, just so many times. We had school from 10:00 to 16:10 and our class was divided into two “bubbles”. Even though I missed the other group, I was happy to finally be back.



© INE VAN OVERVELDT

At school, things felt weird because of the distance we had to keep, even during breaks while wearing those facemasks.

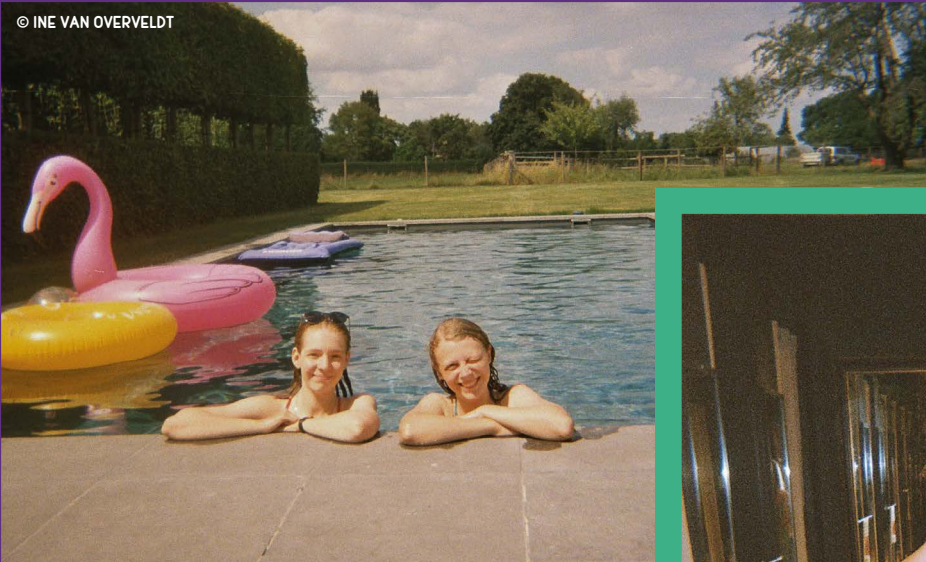
Sometimes others broke those rules because staying social with friends was hard: we often had to yell to hear each other over the 1,5 metres distance.



© INE VAN OVERVELDT

Being able to tennis again was such a relief. Sitting at home for so long made me want to sport again. Although my mom and I went on a lot of walks, I missed being on the field.

© INE VAN OVERVELDT



Every year after the finals in June, I go swimming at my best friend Amber's house. This year was no different, luckily! It was one of the first times I saw her since the outbreak. It felt like summer again.

© INE VAN OVERVELDT



My first time shopping since the lockdown was for my graduation dress. My graduation was on the 30th of June. Only my parents could attend, so my sister sadly missed that important milestone. Although it was great to still have a way to say goodbye, we couldn't throw our graduation hats in the air because of the virus. The whole ceremony felt a bit off.

© INE VAN OVERVELDT



Normally, we would have gone on vacation to Seattle (USA) this year to attend my nephew's wedding. I was looking forward to it, it would have been my first time on a plane! Obviously, we couldn't go anymore. My nephew still got married but without friends and family, yet we all watched the ceremony live on Youtube. Instead of flying to America, we went on a short vacation with the car to the Belgian Ardennes, still fun though!

"Taking these pictures was a lot of fun. I was looking forward to the results. What I learnt from the lockdown and what I want others to learn too is to live in the moment. You never know

what will happen next, like some crazy pandemic that messes up all your plans. If you live today and are able to think outside of the box, you can make the best of everything." •



“MY PROBLEMS SEEMED SOLVED WHEN I SMOKED WEED, BUT EVERYTHING GOT WORSE”

**17-YEAR OLD DJAFFAR
OPENS UP ABOUT HIS
HISTORY WITH CANNABIS**

🕒 5 MIN

Belgian student Djaffar (17) lit up his first joint at 14 with his new friends. He didn't like it, but his life took many turns when he decided to smoke a second one. →

We from Boxes team, meet Djaffar in a park on a hot, sunny day. Djaffar is very much on time, walking towards us with headphones alongside his bike. He is wearing black sneakers and sweatpants. Djaffar tells his story under a false name.

DIFFICULT START

“When I was fourteen, I was in trouble for fighting at school”, shares Djaffar. Around the same time, he got caught for using fake money and theft. “How I got into all of that? Well, I was surrounded by a lot of friends who were up to no good. After months, I ran out of luck when I tried to steal earphones with fake money. The cashier noticed and I rushed

went to bed, I had to do chores.” Djaffar hated that and wasn’t used to it. “My biological mom with whom I couldn’t live anymore was way more chill than my foster parent. That’s why I wanted to go outside, get high and find calmness.” To escape, Djaffar used more and more weed, at one point almost every day.

Djaffar was struggling with himself, his past and his emotions. “I can’t really grasp what was happening to me: I just wanted to be able to breathe. I felt bad and if I smoked, I felt a lot more at ease but actually, I just felt worse”, mumbles Djaffar quietly.

lot of time on his hands, he started selling even more. “It’s the only thing I can remember from that period of my life. I was just wandering around, drinking, smoking. My foster mom was always at work and I was just home alone.”

“ANGRY AT MYSELF”

Eventually, Djaffar was sent away from his foster home because of his drug use. “When I got arrested at school in September, I thought I had to go to the youth detention centre but then I got another chance.” Someone from the foster system Djaffar was in, arranged that he could go to a youth institution. “Before I could do that, I had to go to a work camp in Slovenia, in Eastern-Europe to better myself.”

“I was sad and angry at myself because I had let it come so far. After getting arrested, I should have stopped smoking and selling, and should’ve started focusing on school and behaving well. Then I would have never had to go to Slovenia, never have been kicked out of foster care and probably finished my school year. But I just gave up.”

WORK CAMP

In Slovenia, every day at 7:00 the alarm went off. One hour later, Djaffar had to be on the field of the farm he was staying at. “Throughout the day I had to harvest potatoes and cut wood.” In a small town of only twenty people where Djaffar was the only person of colour, he had to work for three months without further guidance. His contact with the outside world was limited to a twenty-minute phone call every month.

“I will never go back to Slovenia”, Djaffar exclaims. “I hated it there. They treated me like I was a criminal. The oldest son of the family I was staying with was an *asshole*. When we went carolling for a local holiday in February, at every house he said that I was a “problem child”. That

“I GOT HIGH JUST TO BE ABLE TO BREATHE”

off as quickly as I could, but the police still got me.” Because of everything he did before, Djaffar knew if he got caught one more time, he would be sent to a youth detention centre.

He changed schools and made new friends who turned out to be drug dealers. “I was curious about doing cannabis, so I asked them if I could try it out.” But smoking weed didn’t do anything for Djaffar. “Those boys told me I would only start feeling the effects if I tried again.” And the second time, cannabis made Djaffar feel calm and completely zoned-out.

SMOKING AS AN ESCAPE

Because of a difficult home situation, Djaffar stayed with a foster mom who was very strict, he says. They fought a lot: “From the moment I came home until I

To make money himself, Djaffar started selling drugs. “I was making a lot of money and started smoking even more. I had enough money, enough weed, enough everything.”

ONLY DRINKING AND SMOKING

“Even though cannabis may not be deadly, smoking that much had a huge impact on me.” For example, if Djaffar smoked the day before, he felt completely disconnected from the people around him. “Cannabis made me so tired and took away all my motivation, I was always sleeping in class. I forgot a lot and looked like a junkie: I was really thin with sore eyes.”

Then at the beginning of his fifth year in high school, Djaffar got caught with a big amount of cannabis and his school called the police and he got suspended. With a

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, ISSUES OR WORRIES ABOUT DRUGS, YOU CAN GO TO AN ADULT YOU TRUST OR CALL, SKYPE, CHAT OR MAIL THE FLEMISH DRUGLIJN ON 078 15 10 20 OR GO TO DRUGLIJN.BE.

really hurt me. He just put me in that box while I was there to better my life.”

BACK TO BELGIUM

When Djaffar returned to Belgium, he started living at the youth institution. His friends didn't turn away from him after hearing his story. “My friends understand my difficult situation. If they wouldn't, they wouldn't be my friends.” Going to school again wasn't possible because of coronavirus. He will have to redo his school year.

Today, Djaffar is not afraid to admit he's still using weed. “I can control it better now. But there are still moments when I want to smoke every day.” If he could warn others, he would tell them to never start using weed. “If you really want to experiment, do it with people who are responsible and know about the effects of it*, so they can look after you.” •

Cannabis, marihuana, weed: all synonyms for the drug of the cannabis plant.

•Smoking this drug is not without risks as it intensifies your emotions. If you feel bad, it can make you feel worse and even lead to a 'bad trip': you start feeling anxious, panicked, confused or even get hallucinations.

•Overall, smoking weed makes it harder to concentrate, so getting good grades at school becomes more difficult. These effects can last up to months. Inhaling cannabis smoke can damage your lungs, heart and even cause cancer.

•Weed is a drug you can get addicted to and quitting can be really hard. Above all, weed is illegal to use and sell in Belgium.



8 WAYS YOU CAN SAVE THE CLIMATE

CHECKLIST

🕒 5 MIN

Our time is ticking to take action for the climate. By 2030, our carbon emissions should be cut in half, as world leaders agreed in Paris in 2015. If not, we might find ourselves in an irreversible climate catastrophe. Can you check off all these boxes of ways you help the environment?

1. YOU'RE GOING FOR VEGGIE NUGGETS 🍌

Let's start with the basics: greenhouse gasses, like carbon dioxide, have been increasing in our atmosphere. They make the temperature rise on earth and change our climate. This rise causes catastrophes like melting ice caps, rising sea levels, drought and many animals going extinct. But where do these gasses come from?

Well, **animal farming is the second biggest cause for greenhouse gas emissions by humans**, next to fossil fuels. It takes up around 18 per cent of all greenhouse gasses humans produce. Producing meat is so polluting because we need a lot of water, energy and land, which makes us lose forests, plants and animal species and pollutes our water and air. Besides that, when animals digest their foods, they produce methane gas, another greenhouse gas that is way stronger than carbon dioxide.

If we put it into perspective: one kilogram of beef is as polluting as driving 180 kilometres by car. Even though completely cutting out meat from your

diet would be best, eating less meat would be an awesome start to save the planet.

2. YOU HAVE DRIVEN ENERGY VAMPIRES AWAY FROM YOUR HOME 🔌

Yes, your phone charger is using electricity just by being plugged in. These so-called vampire electronic devices consume energy when you're not using them. Did you know that 5 per cent of energy consumption in the United States is wasted by vampire power? That is as much energy as Italy uses in a whole year.

Why is it bad to use a lot of energy? In Belgium, most energy in our homes comes from nuclear energy and fossil fuels, like gas oil and natural gas. When those fossil fuels are burnt, they release the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide and the temperature of our earth rises again. Nuclear energy, on the other hand, doesn't release carbon dioxide but comes with a lot of risks and dangerous waste.

All energy consumption has an impact on our planet, however, fossil fuels

are more harmful than renewable energy, like solar panels. But it's a good start to try and limit your electricity usage, just by plugging out some electronics when you're not using them.

3. YOU CHOOSE PLANT-BASED LATTES ☕

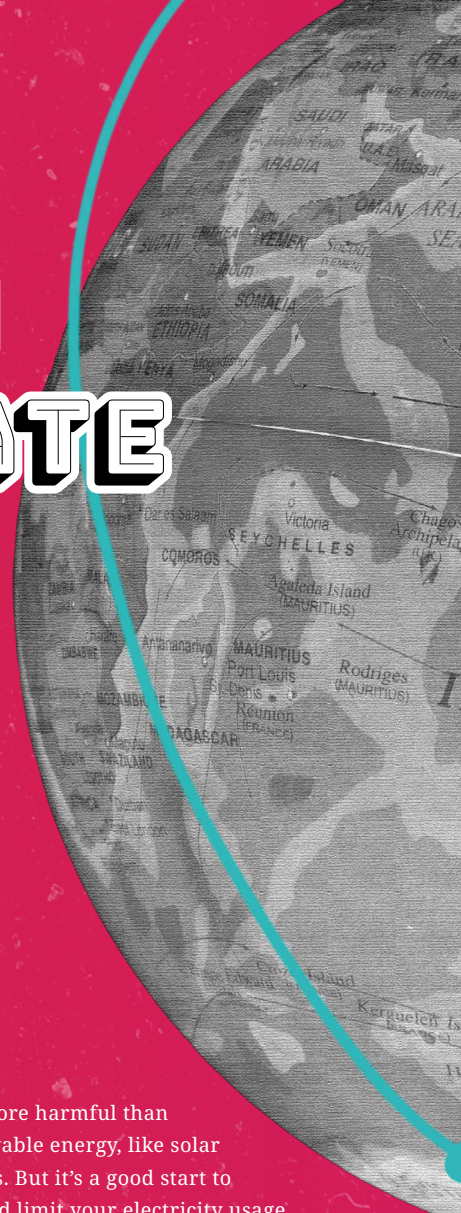
According to the non-governmental environmental organisation WWF, the demand for milk products or dairy puts a lot of pressure on the planet. There are approximately 270 million dairy cows in the world. Cows produce methane gasses, as mentioned above, which further harm our climate.

Besides that, **producing a single glass of milk every day for a year requires land the size of two tennis courts**.

Expert baristas say soy or oat milk are best alternatives.

4. YOU AND YOUR BIKE GO PLACES 🚲

It's often tempting to choose the car over the bus. In Belgium, 22,4 per cent of all carbon emissions polluting the air comes from transport.





To save the planet, we should limit those emissions. So **next time: go by public transport, walk or take your bike and if you must take the car, try carpooling with friends.** That way, there are fewer cars on the streets, which means less carbon dioxide is released in the air and so the earth's temperature will rise less.

5. YOU LIMIT MUNCHING AVOCADOS 🥑

Avocados are a big thing: we eat it on toast, turn it into guacamole and put it into a viral song. Yet it has a huge environmental impact. Avocados require a lot of energy and water to grow. On top of that, it is mainly imported from Latin America.

Aeroplanes are a big polluter and so food that comes from far away, has a big carbon footprint. Try eating more local foods that are in season.

6. YOUR REUSABLE CUP TRAVELS BY YOUR SIDE 🥤

Barbie taught us wrong: plastic is not fantastic. Numbers of the environmental magazine National Geographic showed in 2019 that every year 8 million tons of plastic waste escapes into the ocean. That's the same as **dumping a garbage truck full of plastic into the ocean every minute,** as the non-governmental organisation World Economic Forum writes.

According to the British newspaper The Independent, only nine per cent of plastic today gets recycled. Most plastics can't be naturally broken down, so almost all plastic waste ends up just littering the earth, like the ocean. That way, it threatens the lives of many sea animals. Start bringing drinks in a cute, reusable bottle.

7. YOU USE FASHIONABLE & WASHABLE FACE MASKS 😷

By now, we all know that wearing face masks is not fun. In some places they are mandatory, in others wearing them is advised. But already throw-away

face masks are littering seas worldwide. A French non-profit organisation last June estimated that **soon there will be more masks swimming in the ocean than jellyfish.** Go for the eco-friendly and just as virus-safe reusable alternative.

8. YOU REALLY CARE ABOUT THE PLANET 🌍

The climate crisis is everyone's business, yours as well. So don't be scared to ask questions and speak up. Try educating yourself, your friends and everyone around you. Although a huge part of carbon dioxide comes from big companies, **you can make a difference.** Only with more awareness about what's at stake, people will start caring and try to change. •



WRITERS IN THE PICTURE OF TEEN PLATFORM
REVOLUTION NOW

“THE WORLD IS LOOKING TO US TO GUIDE THE FUTURE”

5 MIN

You're never too young to bring change to the world. 18 teenage girls from over the world work together as journalists for Revolution Now. RevNow is a multimedia platform to encourage teens to be more interested in politics. Four writers open up about their experience from the box of a teenage activist.

© MAKAYLA GUBBAY



MAKAYLA GUBBAY

EDITOR IN CHIEF

“I’m a 17 year old from California, USA. I am the founder and editor-in-chief of RevNow. That means I get to mentor my writers and give them feedback on their work.”

“At 14, I witnessed a protest against Trump’s announcement that he was going to ban transgenders from the military. I talked to the protesters and

decided to write an article about the protest. What followed were two weeks running around in New York City, calling politicians, pitching the story to editors and writing my first article. After that empowering experience, I wanted to create a platform where teens could learn to make a positive impact on the world in their ways.”

“Creating RevNow was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made. There are obvious obstacles to being a young activist, like I can’t vote and I have limited experience. However, being a teen activist brings you so many opportunities. The world is looking to us to guide the future. In my experience, being a young activist is empowering and fulfilling.”

ELIZABETH BRATTON

WRITER & SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER

“I am 17 years old and from the United Kingdom. I’ve been in journalism since I was 14. I am the one in charge of breaking stories about politics, culture, conflict and activism. Most recently, I began writing about sports, although I’m certainly still getting used to that!”

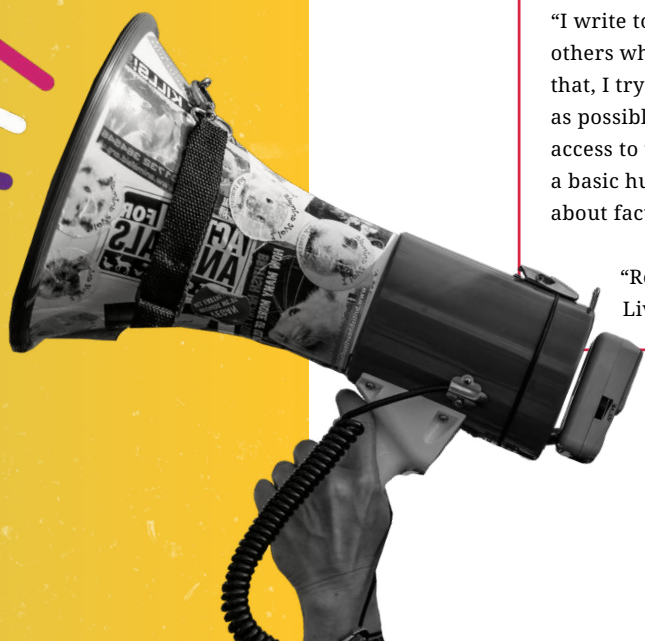
“I write to make the voices heard of others who may be ignored. Besides that, I try to make news as accessible as possible for young people. Having access to the unfiltered truth should be a basic human right, that’s why I write about facts.”

“Recently, I attended a Black Lives Matter protest, which

© ELIZABETH BRATTON



was organised and attended by young people. Some older bystanders mocked us and thought we were simply disruptive teenagers. However, because we came with at least 100, most people took us seriously. If something is making you unhappy in the world, you need to know how to change it. We as young people have a lot of power, but often don’t know how to use our power and that needs to change.”





© HANNAH WILLIAMS

HANNAH WILLIAMS

WRITER AND PODCAST CO-HOST

“I am a 19-year-old activist from Boston on the east coast of the US, but currently live in San Diego in California.

I mostly focus on women’s rights, sexual assault awareness and domestic abuse because I was assaulted myself. While still dealing with the traumatic stress from that, I spend my time speaking up about rape scandals and share my stories with young men and women to bring awareness and educate them on the issues.”

“It’s important to speak out and share your story, so other survivors know they are not alone. People should be concerned and help women, not ignore them.”

“Activism and engagement in politics are important to me because that is how things get done. I don’t want to teach my future daughter what a rape whistle is, tell her how to use pepper spray or teach her to never walk alone. I want her to grow up in a society without rape.”

“Being a teen activist can be very hard, I’m not going to lie, especially as a young woman in America. People will disagree with you and think you should go back to the kitchen, not out there fighting for an important cause. That pushes me to be better and stronger. It’s history in the making, and you can be sure we will be going down swinging.”

LILLIE DAVIDSON
BREAKING NEWS REPORTER &
SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER



© LILLIE DAVIDSON

“I am 16 years old and live in the best place in the world, Texas, the United States. National politics is my passion. I sometimes even get in trouble at school for following important hearings on the news instead of paying attention to class but journalism is my calling.”

“Ever since I was five and learned to read, the newspaper has been a part of my life. Before I joined RevNow, I never wrote a single article and never considered writing as a career. But from the moment I started, there was no going back.”

“Being a young activist can be frustrating at times, it feels like you care more about ‘adult’ issues than actual adults do. That’s a big burden to carry. But someday I will have children and grandchildren and I want to tell them that I did everything in my power to build and protect a safe, equal world for them. Caring about each other regardless of gender, orientation, politics or religion can benefit us all. I want a society of kindness without racism, separation or boxes. It takes all of us to make the world better and we can’t do that when we are divided.” •

WHY GENDER PRONOUNS MATTER

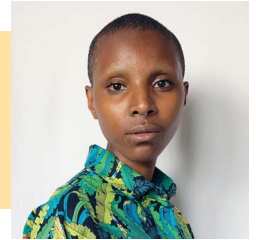
“WHEN THERE IS NO THIRD OPTION, IT FEELS LIKE YOU DON'T EXIST”

We've been stuck with gender stereotypes for a while now and some people completely break free from the box of man or woman. Some with a non-binary gender identity don't want to be called 'he' or 'she', and we should call them the pronouns they want. →

🕒 5 MIN



Uwi Van Hauwermeiren is a spokesperson at Wel Jong niet Hetero, the non-governmental organisation for LGBTQ+ youth (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and more) in Flanders and Brussels. Uwi uses they/them pronouns and identifies as non-binary.



© ROOHE CAM

LET'S GET SOME TERMINOLOGY DOWN

To explain the difference between gender identity, gender expression and sex, we talk about the genderbread cookie which comes from gingerbread and gender. (see picture). Van Hauwermeiren: "Your gender identity is who you are, your brain. While your gender expression is how you present yourself, for example with hairstyle, body language or clothes. Your sex is decided on what's between your legs when you are born."

Being non-binary means you fall on a spectrum of gender identities that go beyond male and female. Some people who identify as non-binary have no gender at all (agender), switch between genders (gender-fluid) or have a third gender. "No one is exactly the same, you get to decide for yourself what gender means to you", says Van Hauwermeiren.

A THIRD OPTION

Van Hauwermeiren: "Most people think very stereotypically, they only know two pronouns, 'she' for women and 'he' for men." However, not everyone wants to be addressed with those pronouns. "When the law does not give you any third option, it feels like you just don't exist."

In English, many people who identify as non-binary prefer to be addressed with 'they/them', as this is genderneutral. In Dutch we often go for 'die/hen'.

However, people in Belgium still don't know a lot about this today, which results in using the wrong pronouns.

BELGIUM STUCK IN A DEBATE

On our passport in Belgium, you can see your sex, it shows male or female. "What's more important than your sex, is how you want people to address you and that's your gender identity", shares Van Hauwermeiren. For some people, their sex is different from how they identify. Your passport could say male, while you want others to address you with 'she/her'. "That's why it's so important to know each others' pronouns, so you don't misgender anyone."

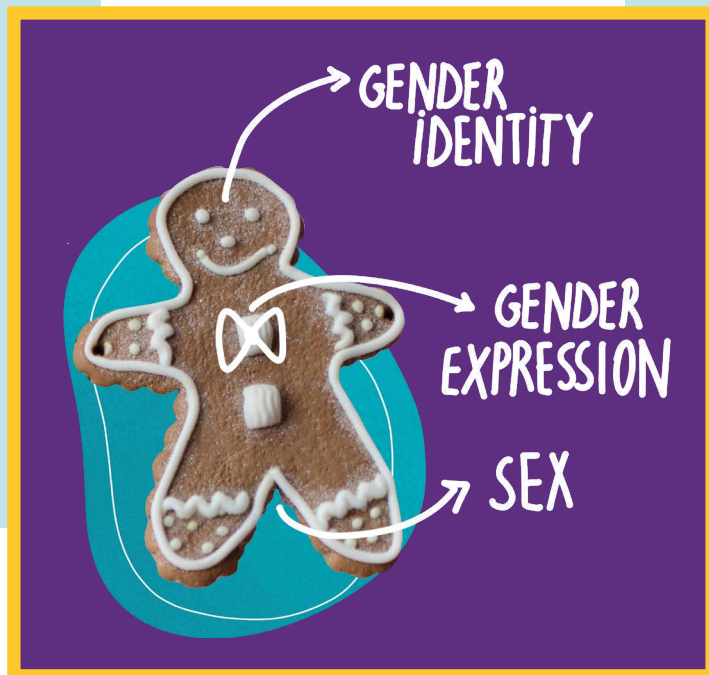
Ever since 2008, there has been a debate in Belgium about what should happen to our passports: if there should be a third option x, besides male and female, or if your sex should just be left out on your pass. But there hasn't been a lot of progress in that debate.

In other countries, they've been looking into the gender debate for far longer. "For example, in California (USA) you can change your gender to x on your passport. In Great-Britain's official dictionary, 'they' was added as a single pronoun, beside 'he' and 'she'. In English, it's also more common to address people in writings with 'Mx.', which could be pronounced as mixer, as an alternative to 'Mr.', mister, or 'Mrs.', misses. But in Dutch, we still don't have an alternative."

WHAT COULD WE DO BETTER?

"Teenagers can make a difference by talking to each other. Don't be scared to discuss these topics with others who may see things differently. If you're young, you learn more from peers than from some authority", shares Van Hauwermeiren.

"If you hear someone else slip up by using wrong pronouns, you should correct them." Let's say, you and your friends are discussing the newest single from Sam Smith, the British singer-songwriter who told the world in 2019 that they were non-binary. If one of your friends uses 'he' to address the singer, you could quickly correct them by saying that Sam Smith now prefers 'they'. "That way, using different pronouns will become more normal and people who identify as non-binary will feel more accepted." •





KION THEY/THEM
18, SCOTLAND

“Pronouns are important to me as it lowers the level of dysphoria* that I feel. Also, it gave me gender euphoria* to have people respect how I identify. If they use the right pronouns, they acknowledge that gender is on a spectrum. It’s disappointing once you have told someone how you identify and they ignore it and still use the wrong pronouns. It can feel like there is no respect for you as a person. However, if a stranger misgenders me, I typically politely correct them and move on.”



ALEX HE/HIM
16, SCOTLAND

“I go by ‘he/him’. Pronouns are obviously important because they are a way of connecting you to your gender. I’m transgender and came out 3 years ago. After having struggled with dysphoria* for a long time in my life, finally getting called by the correct pronouns gave me a sense of gender euphoria*. Finally, people saw me as a boy.”



ANT THEY/THEM
23, UK

“Why pronouns are important is a complicated question - the pronouns themselves are just words. I get misgendered fairly regularly so I try not to think about them at all. But what is important to me is being seen and engaged with as my authentic self. The words ‘they/them’ don’t have any significance at all, however, when I attach them to myself, I feel stronger and more powerful. Those words express who I am and how I feel more fully than the words ‘she/her’ would.”

WHAT ARE GENDER DYSPHORIA AND GENDER EUPHORIA

Van Hauwermeiren: “If what you see in the mirror is not who you are in your head, you could experience distress. Your gender identity doesn’t match the way your body has developed because of your sex, and that’s what we call gender dysphoria.”

The opposite of gender dysphoria is euphoria when you feel a sense of joy, comfort within your gender identity.





ZACH HE/HIM,
THEY/THEM
16, USA

“Pronouns are important because they allow someone to express and show themselves easily and simply when being referred to without their name. I often get misgendered by relatives or strangers and it honestly sucks a lot. Sometimes I can get through the day, other times, it makes me cry.”



CAMRYN
THEY/THEM
20, USA

“Pronouns help me define who I am. I never fitted in the box of man or woman, so neutral pronouns are great! My best advice for anyone on the outside is to be more open and understanding towards people who prefer different pronouns. Just try to use the right pronouns and be more aware of it, you know? The best thing you can do is show that you are trying.”

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR ARE STRUGGLING WITH YOUR GENDER, YOU CAN GO TO [TRANSGENDERINFOPUNT.BE](https://transgenderinfopunt.be) OR [LUMI.BE](https://lumi.be) WHERE YOU CAN CHAT, ASK QUESTIONS OR WATCH VIDEOS.
(FROM BELGIUM)**



“EVEN THE MOST POPULAR KIDS CAN BE EXTREMELY LONELY”

WHY LONELINESS SHOULD BE TALKED ABOUT

🕒 5 MIN

Is your loneliness killing you? Besides Britney Spears, you're not the only who is struggling. "No matter what box we're in, we all feel this need to be surrounded by others who understand us", shares Sarah Van Gysegem, teenage expert.



Sarah Van Gysegem
♥ Belgium

For 20 years, Sarah Van Gysegem (46) has been working as a writer at Gezinsbond, an NGO that supports families in Flanders and Brussels. She focusses on teenagers and puberty. She wrote two books about teenage years and gives lectures to parents of teens.

The first lockdown from March until June didn't do teens well.

Van Gysegem: "No, it had a huge impact and made most teens feel lonely. Even the biggest school hater realised how important it is to see people in real life. Chatting online can be a first step, but seeing others in real life is essential, even without touching or hugs."

"Around the age of 15, teenagers start looking for who they want to be, they start going out and experiment. That's when you need your peers to grow."

"But if your social life isn't going well, it's very hard to deal with. That's why I'm hoping schools can start in a normal way in September."

So loneliness is a big issue?

Van Gysegem: "There's this cliché, that feeling lonely is something for asocial loners, but anyone can struggle with it. Even your most popular, chatty and spontaneous classmates can feel extremely lonely."

"A lot of teens think they are the only one feeling lonely. And they don't want to be the odd one out, they want to be part of the group. And so when we talked to young people, we found that loneliness is a huge taboo for them."

Where does that taboo come from?

Van Gysegem: "Well, I think social media play a big role. We still post our most social, happy moments online."

"If you're feeling lonely and scroll down, it's easy to think that everyone else has this shiny day filled with laughter and friends, while that may be far from the truth. Photos online show us a twisted view of reality. No one feels good every single day, but Instagram can make you believe your friends do."

"I don't underestimate our youth, most of them are aware that everyone only shares their best sides on the internet, but our brains unconsciously start comparing ourselves to the posts we see and that can make you insecure."

Why do we all only share our happiest pictures?

"When you go out, you want to look good, right? Well, if you show yourself to the whole world, it's normal that you want to share your best side as well."

"You know when you accidentally take a selfie when looking at your phone and you capture all those chins, I should try to post one of those, but that's not easy, isn't it? I think that you have to be very strong to show your weaknesses."



But that's not the only reason for loneliness?

"No, of course not. Our society is very focussed on achievements and being social. As a teen today, you have to succeed in so many things. I think the pressure is a lot higher than when I was young. With the bar so high, a lot of teens see themselves as a failure. It's easy to then feel like an outsider."

What are the dangers of loneliness?

"In the worst case, loneliness can end in complete isolation, when you never leave your room and see no one. But for me, loneliness is dangerous when you keep it to yourself. Because of that taboo, it may be hard to speak up and when you keep struggling on your own, you end up in a negative spiral of depression. It's proven that talking about your problems helps to make them less heavy."

So speaking up is important, but also really hard to do.

"Definitely! Taking the first step can be very difficult, but when you just boldly tell someone you're feeling lonely, chances are big they sometimes feel the same as you do."

So push yourself to go out, to move, to actively look for people to talk to and be open about feeling lonely, especially during the lockdown. It makes a difference."

"I am a big fan of the online platform Awel.be, you can chat with professionals but also find teens your age who struggle with the same issues. Besides, if you just google that you're lonely, you will find a lot of other online helplines. Go talk about it." •

NUMBERS

When picturing someone feeling lonely, chances are you imagine an elderly person, sitting alone in a rocking chair. But young people feel lonelier than any other generation, shows the BBC Loneliness Experiment, carried out by different British universities across 237 countries in 2018. 40 per cent of people between 16 and 24 years old feel lonely often or very often. And that's a lot, compared to 29 per cent of elders between 65 and 74 years old and 27 per cent of people older than 75.



Amber De Vos (18 y.)
Herent, Belgium.

©AMBER DE VOS

"I often feel lonely. It hits me when I have nothing to do or when I feel down. Around two years ago, everyone around me started experimenting: getting into relationships, going out and drinking. It felt like I was behind and that made me feel so lonely. I used to be jealous of others who had a whole gang of friends around them. Today, I may not have a lot of friends, but those around me are really trustworthy and that's more important to me. When I'm lonely now, I just need someone to talk to, who understands me no matter what."



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

IS THAT WHAT VAGINAS AND PENISES REALLY LOOK LIKE?

🕒 7 MIN

Porn is filled with stereotypes, myths and clichés. The bigger the better, hair is a no-go and the one who orgasms the loudest wins the prize. “Porn is rarely talked about in school”, says our expert Wannés Magits. So here we are, bringing you answers to 11 most frequently asked questions.

Wannés Magits is policy advisor at the Flemish research centre for sexual health, Sensoa. He specifically works around sexual education for children and teens.



© WANNÉS MAGITS

1. WHAT IS PORN?

Porn is mainly sexually explicit media, that people watch, listen or read to relax or get horny. There are a lot of pornographic videos and photos out there on the internet. Yet porn also comes in other, sometimes unexpected,

formats like sound clips and written stories. Within each category, there is a lot of variation. For example, big production companies make high-budget movies in studios, but some people make amateur porn in their bedroom.



2. WHY SHOULD WE TALK MORE ABOUT PORN?

First, porn is one of the topics least talked about in schools. Magits: “I can understand why. It’s personal and more daring to discuss. But we notice teenagers are curious about it.” In 2017, Flemish students asked to learn more in class about porn in a survey from Vlaamse Scholierenkoepel, the Flemish student union for secondary education.

Porn can give you twisted expectations of what sex is like, especially to women. “School pays a lot of attention to the penis. All boys know what jerking off or masturbating is, but masturbating for girls is hardly ever discussed in sexual orientation class”, highlights Magits.

3. IS WATCHING PORN OKAY?

“Some teenagers watch porn to learn new things. For example, they can find out what some body parts look like or how sex even works”, explains Magits. But it is important to be critical of what you’re seeing. “Porn is made to earn money and doesn’t reflect reality.”

A lot of research has been done about the effects of watching porn, but there is not one clear answer. “On one side, research warns for sexism or in more serious cases erectile dysfunctions (ed. when a person with a penis can’t get hard anymore). On the other hand,

watching pornography could help you relax or teach you new positions you could try if your partner is okay with that. For a lot of people porn opens up a whole new world of what sexuality is and can be, and that’s not different for teenagers.”



4. DOES EVERYONE WATCH PORN?

No, not everyone watches porn. Magits: “Check for yourself if porn is something you like and know that it’s perfectly okay to not watch it.”

“When we look at the numbers, boys in general watch porn more often. I don’t know why that is”, says Magits. “Gender norms and stereotypes in society do encourage boys more to be sexually active. Girls on the opposite by standards should be shyer, maybe that could explain it.”

5. WHAT KIND OF BODIES DO YOU SEE IN PORN?

As you read in the first FAQ here, there is a lot of variation within porn. But if we look at what big production companies make, we see many stereotypes.

Magits: “Porn actors get cast because they are generally considered attractive and good performers. Men are muscular, women are in shape. They both get

their makeup done, pubic hair is trimmed or shaved, butts are bleached, some people even have their vulva (ed. the outside of the vagina) operated.”

Besides all of that, it’s important to realize that a lot of magic happens with camera angles, for example, to make booties and penises bigger on screen. →

Want to know more about the taboo on sex? Go to [page 51](#) to discover a podcast on this topic.

EDITORS NOTE

NELKE: “I wanted to write this story because around puberty, I wondered why my vagina wasn’t the ‘standard vagina’. I was terrified. But I never expected every girl to have the exact eyes or nose, then why did I believe all vaginas were copies of each other?”

YANNICK: “Because of porn I thought all men were circumcised. Only after having my circumcision done at 19, I realized that certainly was not the case. In Belgium, where I live, less than 20 per cent of men are circumcised. My whole idea of what a normal penis looks like was twisted.”

6. WHAT DO PENISES LOOK LIKE IN PORN?

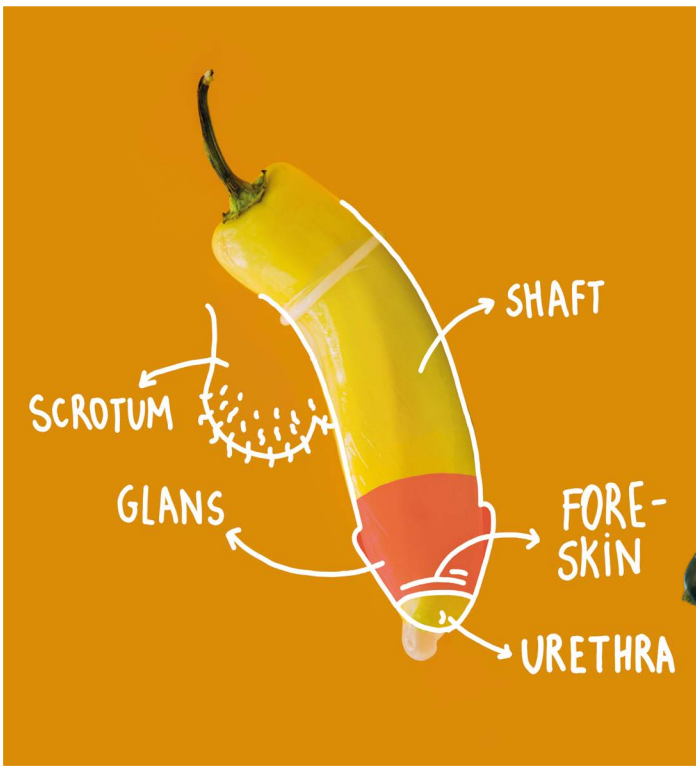
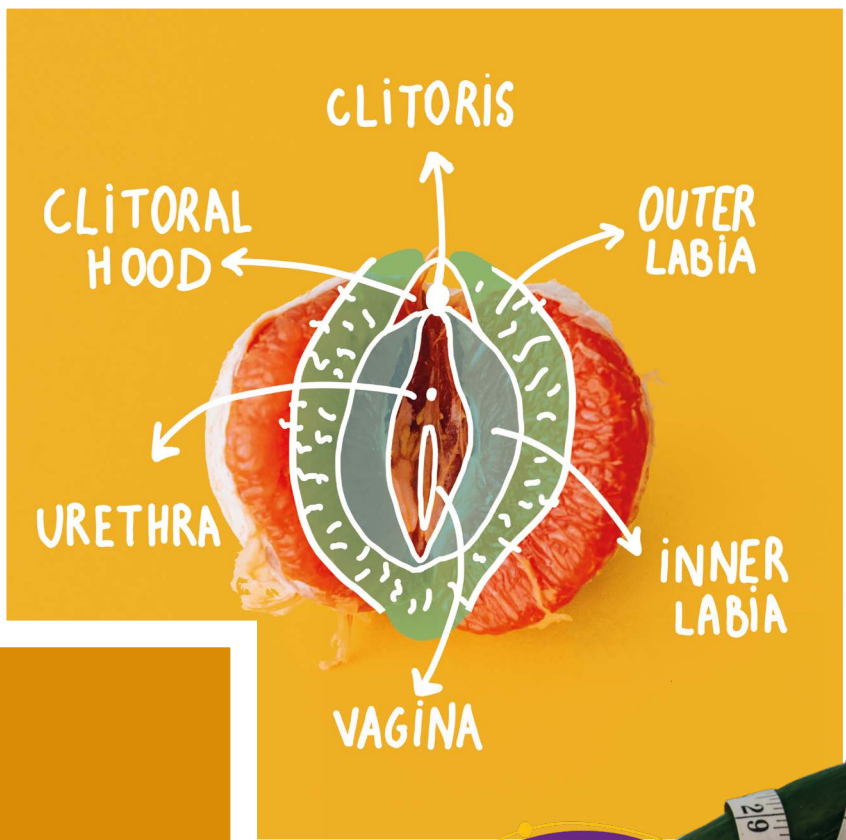
For male porn stars goes the bigger, the better. Numbers from Sensoa show that the average penis is between 12 and 17 centimetres long when hard and when flaccid between 5 and 13 centimetres. But porn actors almost always have bigger penises than average and they use tricks to make it look even bigger, like using a pump to enlarge their penis. Porn actors are also cast for lasting long before they ejaculate or cum. Magits: “Porn creates standards that most guys can’t live up to.”

When you watch porn, chances are big penises are circumcised (when the foreskin has been surgically removed). A lot of mainstream porn is produced in the United States where on average 75 per cent of men are circumcised because of religion or esthetic reasons. That may explain why penises without foreskin have become the standard image in mainstream porn.

7. WHAT ABOUT THE 'PERFECT' VAGINA?

“In porn, you almost never see women with bigger inner labia than outer labia”, shares Magits. Labia or lips are folds of skin, that protect the clitoris, the urethra (where the pee comes out of) and the vagina opening. The outer labia are the lips on the outside where pubic hair grows and the inner labia rest in between.

The ideal vagina in most porn has the outer labia hiding away the inner labia so you can’t see any lips. However, in reality, vaginas come in all different shapes and forms and it’s perfectly normal to have bigger inner labia that you can see hanging.



8. ARE THOSE STEREOTYPES BAD?

“There isn’t a problem with the types of genitalia and bodies that are shown in porn, but more diversity should be included. That’s not the case today, porn shows a very one-sided image of what sex and people look like.”

“If you only ever see the same kind of bodies and genitalia, those images become the standard. If you don’t fit into those boxes, of course, you start doubting yourself”, shares Magits. That’s why stereotypes could harm your confidence.

10. WHAT ABOUT CONDOMS?

The part where pornographic actors put on condoms or use any other form of protection is almost always cut out from the video. “I suppose it bothers some people to see a condom and porn still has to sell.”

But whether you’re gay, straight or identify with any other sexuality, protecting yourself is important. Sexually transmittable diseases (STD’s) are still increasingly spreading in Belgium. Most of them can be easily be treated, but prevention is better than cure.

The most accessible way to protect yourself from STD’s is by using a condom. A condom is a thin pouch that goes around the penis. You can buy them online, at a store or pharmacy. Perhaps your school even has condoms you can pick up for free. Telling a partner you want to use a condom can be awkward but sticking up for yourself is important and sometimes even sexy.

9. WHY ARE THESE THE IDEALS IN PORN?

Why are those genitalia portrayed as the ideal penises and vaginas? Magits: “I’m not sure. For women, I guess because smaller inner labia look ‘younger’.” During puberty, the labia become larger and darker and pubic hair starts

to grow. That’s why a vagina with small lips reminds of a time before puberty penises in porn are bigger because there’s this myth that bigger penises lead to better sex, but that is not true.



11. AM I THE ONLY ONE INSECURE ABOUT MY BODY?

As Magits explained in question 8, it’s easy to think something is wrong with your body or genitalia when you never see yourself represented in porn.

But not only porn is guilty of planting insecurities in our heads. “In advertisements, you often see these models who spend hours getting their makeup done. Add at least as many hours in Photoshop, and the bar is very high for how you should look.”

On top of that, the way you are treated based on your looks has an immense impact on your confidence. “If you are bullied about your appearance, it’s harder to love what you see in the mirror.” Take runway models: “They meet the standard of how you ideally should look but are often still very insecure because models are judged on their bodies every single day.” So no, you’re not the only one who’s insecure sometimes. •

OUR EXPERIENCE

“OUR SEXUALITY BECAME A FACT ABOUT US, BUT THINGS SHIFTED”

WHEN A GAY AND A LESBIAN FALL IN LOVE WITH EACH OTHER

3 MIN

Imagine you claimed a label for years and then no longer fit into it anymore. We as editors of Boxes recently fell out of our box, hard. Yannick was into boys and Nelke was into girls, but then we fell in love with each other. We decided to step out in the world again, this time without labels.

NELKE: “At 15, I had my first real crush and it was on a girl. I panicked and a year later fell in love with a girl again, who I ended up being in a relationship with for three years. I clearly had a thing for girls. Coming to terms with that was hard for me, but after a long time, I accepted it. I claimed all things rainbowy, went to

to me, it’s how I identified because I was very much uninterested in boys.”

YANNICK: “As long as I remember, people had been calling me gay because I did not fit the idea of what a man stereotypically looks like. When I was around 16 years old, I discovered that I actually was attracted to other boys. At the time, I was happy to finally put myself in a box. After just a few days of thinking hard in my room, I bravely came out as gay.”

CONFUSING

Our sexuality became a fact about us, a part of our identity. But then things started to shift. After studying together for three years and being best friends, something sparked between us. Can you imagine how confusing it was to us when we started having feelings for each other? We mean us: those who were so out and proud?

today. For some people in the LGBTQ+ community, having and claiming those labels is super important. Let’s be real, the community is still discriminated against without those labels, there is nothing to fight for. We still feel part of the LGBTQ+ community today, even though we’re in a straight-passing relationship.

NO LABELS FOR US

Our whole point is that we want to live without those labels or boxes. When asked if we are bisexual, we don’t know the answer. It’s not something we want to think about. In a world (and magazine) filled with labels and boxes, we want you to know this next thing: “If you’re looking for your label, what you identify with or who you fall in love with, remember that it’s okay to find peace without a label too.” •

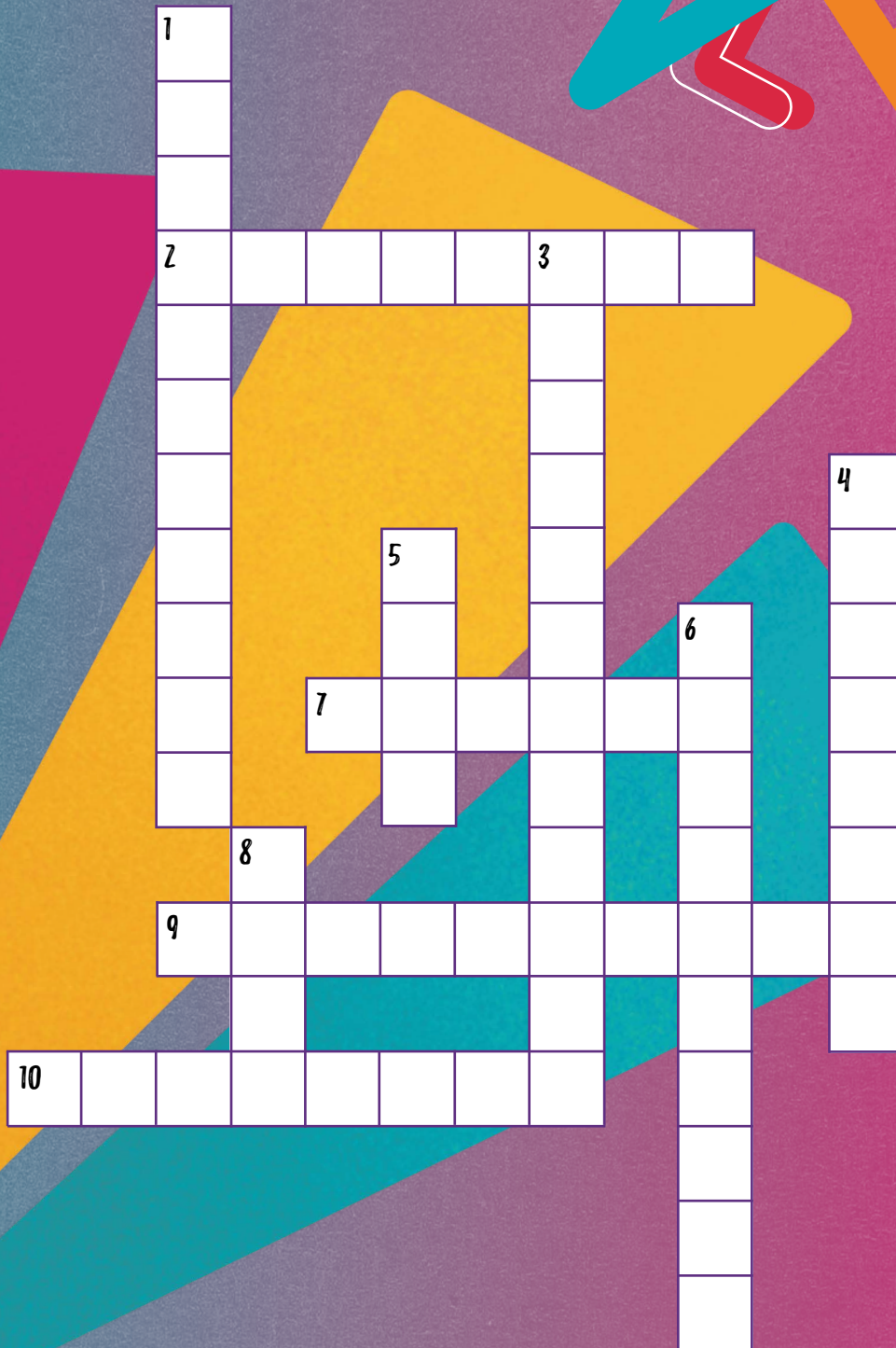
“WE DON’T WANT PEOPLE TO THINK WE WENT THROUGH A PHASE”

pride and took every opportunity I had to make any school assignment about the LGBTQ+ community. Even though the box of ‘lesbian’ always tasted a bit strange

One thing we know is that we don’t want people to think we went through a phase of being gay, what we felt as sixteen-years-olds was as true as our feelings







ACROSS

- 2. The belief that men and women should have equal rights
- 7. Something that is kept or meant to be kept unknown or unseen by others
- 9. Sadness because you have no company
- 10. Restriction to stop the coronavirus outbreak: when you have to stay at home

DOWN

- 1. Confidence in yourself, self-respect
- 3. A drawing or graphic element for a book, website or magazine
- 4. Someone who campaigns for political or social change
- 5. A plant that people smoke to get high
- 6. A fixed idea we have about others
- 8. Heavy music, often with an electric guitar and drums



6 PODCASTS THAT BREAK TRADITIONAL WAY OF THINKING

Rather learn something while sitting on the train or bus? From defying female gender roles in society to accepting yourself: here are 6 podcasts for you to break free from boxes.

1. MENTAL

This podcast's full name says it all: Mental - The Podcast to Destigmatize Mental Health. The Irish Bobby Temps shares stories about sex, addiction, eating disorders, shame and so much more. During the pandemic, Mental released relatable interviews about the impact of lockdown on our well-being.

2. HIDDEN BRAIN

This show is a bit more scientific but still simple and fun. NPR-reporter Shankar Vedantam researches why we think in certain unseen patterns. You learn tips to broaden your thinking to use in daily life, on dates and with friends. Definitely listen to episode 3: Stereotype Threat, which discusses the dangers of stereotypes.

3. YO, IS THIS RACIST?

Every week American host Andrew Ti, actress Tawny Newsome and their guests answer questions from listeners who wonder if something is racist. Their answers are honest and refreshing.

4. GAYISH PODCAST

American Mike Johnson and Kyle Getz discuss a different stereotype about the LGBTQ+ community every episode. This show started in 2017 and you can listen to more than 180 episodes today. They discuss disabilities, fat shaming, white privilege and on a lighter note even aliens.

5. F**KS GIVEN

Ashamed of being a virgin? Or embarrassed by having a lot of people under your sheets?

F**ks Given breaks these taboos by speaking with guests about their sexual histories, from getting STDs and dirty talk to consent and periods.

6. HAGS: FEMINISM FOR EVERYONE

This weekly podcast deconstructs fixed ideas society has about women. From growing out your eyebrows to bullying, racism and grand romantic gestures: American co-hosts Riley Rose Critchlow and Nicole Wyland, often joined by guests, shy away from nothing. •

Listen to these podcasts on Apple Podcasts or Spotify.

WATCH THESE 3 LIFE-CHANGING FILMS THAT ARE OLDER THAN YOU

Thought old films were too low in quality to have a good story? Think again.

5 MIN



DEAD POETS SOCIETY (1989)

Dead Poets Society is an American teen drama from 1989, directed by Peter Weir and starring Robin Williams, who you may know from the films Mrs. Doubtfire and Jumanji.

1959: the new English teacher John Keating arrives in a conservative boarding school and shakes things up. With poetry, humour and charm, the young teacher inspires his students to think independently and do their own thing. But that evokes outrage among the strict parents and school staff, resulting in a moving story about breaking the status quo. The script by Tom Schulman won an Oscar and many hearts.



DO THE RIGHT THING (1989)

We follow Mookie, a 25-year-old black pizza delivery man standing up against his racist Italian boss, Sal. In less than 24 hours, tensions in the almost black neighbourhood rise. Eventually, a black man loses his life in a violent arrest by a white cop. It's thirty years after the release of this film, yet the story is still all too familiar today.

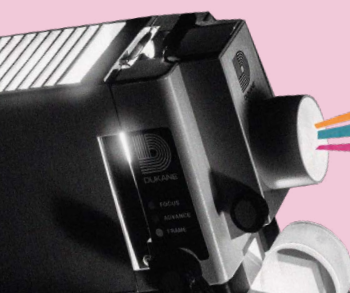
The movie came out in 1989 and was written, produced and directed by the African-American Spike Lee, who takes on the lead in the film as well. Also check out Spike's new movie Da 5 Bloods.



BUT I'M A CHEERLEADER (1999)

This rom-com from 1999 stars Natasha Lyonne from Orange Is The New Black and Russian Doll on Netflix and is directed by Jamie Babbit.

In a satirical, funny way, this movie tackles heavy topics like gay conversion therapy. When the conservative parents of a 17-year-old cheerleader suspect that their daughter is a lesbian, the poor kid gets sent to a camp to 'cure' her from homosexuality. The film does not only discuss sexuality but also questions gender roles. •



DRAWING FOR LIFE

© JOSEFINA SCHARGORODSKY



“I WAS DRAWING STEREOTYPICAL WHITE WOMEN, I BROKE WITH THAT”

Want a nine-to-five office job or something more creative? Five questions answered by Josefina Schargorodsky (32), an Argentinian illustrator who made a career by drawing strong, colourful women. →

🕒 7 MIN



© ANDRES BRIGANTI

NAME: JOSEFINA SCHARGORODSKY
AGE: 32 YEARS OLD
COUNTRY: ARGENTINA
JOB: ILLUSTRATOR FOR BOOKS, MAGAZINES, WEBSITES, TEXTILES AND SO MANY MORE CREATIVE PROJECTS
FAVOURITE PROJECT: ILLUSTRATING A TAROT DECK, WITH 78 DIFFERENT CARDS TO PREDICT THE FUTURE

1. WHEN DID YOU FIND YOUR THING?

“I’ve always been drawing: as a little kid, but also as a teenager in high school, where I was the only one who still drew. Back then, I just didn’t know you could draw to pay the rent.”

“So, I ended up studying fashion design: I loved to sew and make clothes. After college, I worked in fashion for a while, but I didn’t like the industry, because people seemed to believe that everything had to be on trend and was disposable. And that’s so not me. It felt like I was wasting my time, waiting for hours to pass so I could go home and do what I really wanted to do: draw.”

2. HOW DID YOU PURSUE YOUR DREAM?

“Even though I knew what I wanted to do, I couldn’t just stop one day and start illustrating the next day. It was a long process over a few years, starting in 2012, where I was drawing more and working less in fashion. For me, it was very difficult to be patient. Everyone advised me to give it about five years time to become a full-time illustrator. But how could I wait so long?”

“Luckily, my mother was very supportive, especially the first years. She was progressive and always told me and my brothers that we could do whatever we felt like doing if only we gave it our all. Still, she wasn’t sure herself if I was going to make it as an illustrator. That’s

why she always warned me to keep in mind that maybe I would eventually have to find another job.”

3. WHAT IS YOUR WORK LIKE?

“What I draw is very feminine, because I am a woman and a feminist. I am really in touch with that part of myself and I like to express what it’s like being a woman in this world.”

“At first, I found that I was drawing very stereotypically, but I felt that I needed to break with that. Now, I try to portray the

“I DIDN’T KNOW YOU COULD DRAW TO PAY THE RENT”

reality I live in. Argentina is built mostly by immigrants, so people look very different from each other with different ethnicities and bodies. I am not intentionally speaking up about my political ideas, but I do want it to come through naturally in my work.”

4. WAS IT A HARD START?

“Illustrators, at least in Argentina, are mostly women. And sometimes, because you are a woman, clients feel like they can intimidate you more. They presume you don’t know about money or that you just do it for fun. Luckily, I have a really strong personality and I defend myself and push forward. I also tell other female illustrators, my friends, to charge more, to be strong and to not get intimidated by male clients.”

“It’s very hard to live in Argentina economically, because it is a very unstable country. Still I think that everyone here is optimistic. There are a lot of creative people and a lot of freelancers and small businesses. That’s because there is no safety in the country in general, so there

is no safety in having an office job. Then why not go do your own thing?”

“Over the years, I reached small goals that made me work more and grow as an illustrator. One of the big breakthroughs happened in 2016. A group of local ladies organised a market every month and I started to illustrate their flyers for fun. They were paying me very little, but it was more for me to be able to spread my work. Those flyers got attention from a lot of people and made me well-known.”

“What makes a difference for me is that I work a lot with clients from outside Argentina, mostly from the United States. If all my work was local, it would be

very difficult because illustrators here are not as valued or well-paid as in the rest of the world. Because my clients are all over the world, I can be a full-time illustrator.”

5. WHAT DOES YOUR WORK DAY LOOK LIKE?

“I plan my work day myself: I’m a morning person, so I usually wake up around 7 or 8 in the morning and I start working straight away. I work very focussed until 1 or 2, when I have lunch. In the afternoon, I’m lazy and have trouble to focus so I usually do administration, reply emails and look at budgets.”

“With everything going on right now, coronavirus and the fact that I just had a baby, I’m slowing down a bit and working on small projects. In the past, I illustrated a few children’s books and a few adults’ books as well. I hope to do more bigger projects like books again in the future.” •





© JOSEFINA SCHARGORODSKY

GOOD TO KNOW

AFTER ARGENTINA BECAME A DEMOCRACY, THE ECONOMY HAS OFTEN STRUGGLED WITH COLLAPSES. OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS, ITS CURRENCY, THE ARGENTINIAN PESO, HAS LOST A LOT OF ITS VALUE, MEANING THINGS BECOME MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE EVERY DAY.



© JOSEFINA SCHARGORODSKY

BOXES JOINED POP & ROCK CAMP FOR A DAY

🕒 5 MIN

“We play rock to be different from the basic kids”, says drummer Daan (14). Armed with wild hair, two drumsticks and funky socks, Daan is ready to take over the stage with his five-days-old band called The Sexy Sox. This week, teens come together in Antwerp (Belgium) rocking out of their box with one shared passion: music.



One of the four female music coaches, Sara Pepels from the Belgian band Portland on the camp: “In a playful way, we taught very diverse kids how to sing, make music, slay at social media and work in a team. After this week, I feel just as proud and emotional as a teacher letting her kids go.” The camp went a little different than it usually would because of coronavirus measures. For example, the final concert had to be outside in the theatre of OLT Rivierenhof in Antwerp.

Today, the teens perform for their parents, grandparents and friends. We from Boxes are lucky enough to witness the sound-check, rehearsal and the big concert. The teens are stressed but are looking forward to finally show off their newly fine-tuned talents. Emma (16), the blonde girl with the green top and lead singer of The Nameless, wrote an original song Next Station in just two days with her bandmates. The song opens with: “Is there a place that tomorrow will make?”



1. “This week we formed a band, The Sexy Sox because we all love heavy rock”, says Bas, the guitarist. “The camp wasn't all serious but also **fun**: we made rock covers of pop songs like Riptide by Vance Joy.”

2. Emma (16) sings and plays the piano. “I would love a career in music. I feel at place in **different music boxes**.”

3. “I've been playing the violin for 7 years”, shares Vita (13). “But I've only ever done classic. That's why I now wanted to **step out of my comfort zone** and try rock.”

4. Coach Sarah gives one of the teens, Delphine (15), a few last tips during **rehearsal** with social distance and facemask.

5. Matts is only 12 years old, jamming with the four other girls in his band Nameless. To remain safe from coronavirus, he wears his face mask, even on stage. “The camp was organised really well, there was **‘COVID-killer’** disinfectant hand gel everywhere.”

6. Because of the coronavirus, the groups are smaller than usual. That's why **only four bands** could be formed.

7. Some teens like Lili (15) bring **multiple instruments**, like violin and bass here. Why choose one if you can play more?

8. Spending our day with these hopeful, talented teens is inspiring to us. They found **common ground** in music and we are happy to sit in the audience and sing along with covers we know from the radio.

9. “Before stepping on stage, my nerves are fine. But once the **lights** are on me, it's a different story”, says Lotte. Still, they all deliver and get their moment to shine. •

AINT AFRAID

AINT AFRAID



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LEFT: ZARIYYAH, RIGHT: SARINAH
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“WE RAP & SING TO CREATE A SPACE WHERE EVERYONE IS ACCEPTED” 7 MIN

The ‘Aint Afraid’ Twinsz - yes, with an ‘s’ and a ‘z’ for Sakinah and Zakiyyah - are a rap and singing duo from Michigan (USA) who are unapologetically standing up against the prejudices they encounter from their boxes. With their 126.000 Instagram followers, these black, strong, Muslim women are slowly taking over.

BOXES: What do you do?

Zakiyyah: “We sing and rap, do theatre, poetry and spoken word. Spoken word is being on stage and presenting your poetry. We’re really good performers and I’m not saying this to be big-headed. *(both laugh)* You find us on Tiktok, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram and our music is available everywhere like YouTube.”

BOXES: All of that under the name Aint Afraid.

Zakiyyah: “That name comes from the fact that we’re not afraid to be ourselves wherever we are. It’s an affirming and reassuring name. Even when situations feel more fearful or uncomfortable, I remind myself: ‘I ain’t afraid.’”

BOXES: And how old are you?

Zakiyyah: “Well, ... we try to keep that off the record.”

Sakinah: “We’re young people though.”

Zakiyyah: “Right, but when others

see our work, we want them to know us for what we do and not judge us by our age.”

BOXES: What is your art about?

Sakinah: “Messages that inspire and educate.”

Zakiyyah: “We try our best to inform and inspire for goodness. In a way, we also use our art for ourselves to express and share parts of us that we feel we can’t say in other spaces.”

BOXES: What parts are we talking about?

Sakinah: “Our identity is sometimes weird for people to comprehend: being black, Muslim women. You would think that we get support from the communities that we identify with. And we do, but most times, we get questions like: ‘Why are you here? You don’t look like me.’

Those challenges have made us into the people we are today and made us speak out. We need to educate people so that other young black, Muslim girls don’t have to keep dealing with these issues.”

Zakiyyah: “The one advantage we have over others is that we’re twins

and always had each other to share this journey with.”

BOXES: So speaking up is important to you.

Zakiyyah: “Growing up, we were challenged because of our identity. We had to prove ourselves as worthy of whatever we wanted. That’s why we now want to create a space where people know that you don’t need to prove yourself to anyone but yourself.”

BOXES: Is it about making impact?

Sakinah: “Definitely! Fans often tell us: ‘Because of your message, I decided to change this or that about myself’ or ‘Because of your message, despite the bullies at school, I was strong and proud of myself.’ And that’s the biggest goal for us, to encourage people to create positive changes.”

Zakiyyah: “As part of our mission, we want to break up stereotypes about our identities, whether it’s about black people, young people, women or Muslims. Some people really have their own made up ideas about who we are, based off of negative stereotypes that →

have nothing to do with us. And so we want to share true stories and give truthful images of what kind of people we are.

For example, we sing about our religion, because some people just don't know what Islam is about. Some think that we don't believe in Jesus, or that we worship statues or hate other religions. These are wrong ideas and don't have anything to do with us. We use our faith to teach people better."

BOXES: Any other examples of stereotypes you experience?

Zakiyyah: "A lot of people think that because we're Muslim, we can't be as active as we are in society, or as loud and proud to preach the different messages that we have. Because we are young people, people think that we are not worthy of a space at the table to have conversations about what

"WE BREAK STEREOTYPES ABOUT OUR IDENTITIES"

happens in society and our communities, with laws and legislations. Because we are black people, I mean, I don't have to get into that: you know how many negative stereotypes people have about our community: they think we can't be well-educated, well-behaved, or presentable. And we are all of those things."

BOXES: And those ideas lead to people mistreating you?

Sakinah: "Once, we were speaking at a fundraising event. I was talking to three white men for

like five minutes, about homelessness, housing insecurity, housing displacement, the system and policies that can bring change. As young children we were homeless ourselves and that's why we want to speak up about this topic. I asked them if they had any questions and the only thing they had to say was: 'Why do you wear that scarf?'"

Zakiyyah: "Yeah, those are minor issues, but in some situations it's really bad. When we were 12 years old, we were standing outside our house with our younger siblings. Some guy drove by and pointed at us and I'm not going to repeat what he said, but he threatened our life in a very terrible way.

We were just kids. I wrote a poetry piece about that experience because we were never able to play outside the same again: we now had to come in before a certain time and I was often scared for our

lives. That should never happen to anyone."

BOXES: One of your songs 'We Will Breathe' specifically deals with racism. It was written after the black American George Floyd was killed in May 2020 during a violent arrest by white cops.

Sakinah: "The incident sparked a lot of outrage and there was this hashtag going around: 'I can't breathe', which were the last words of George Floyd. #I can't breathe is about oppression, however, we wanted to uplift and mobilize

others by singing 'We will breathe'. That's like: 'Okay, we can't breathe, so what are we doing about that?'"

Zakiyyah: We wrote this song together with our mom and we wanted to uplift people and encourage them to keep going. The song starts as an observation. We sing: "Funny you could feel entitled to take away a life, but I can't feel entitled to stand up for my rights." Then we make it clear that we're not standing for that anymore and sing what we will do about it."

BOXES: It's admirable you're so vulnerable in your songs.

Sakinah: "I've never been ashamed of my story or my experiences. Especially when I recognize that it's not just my story, but it's the story of many others. When I go on stage and talk about my story, I'm sharing the voice of a whole community, and that's empowering.

Zakiyyah: "That's awesome what you said, sis. I also think that if we don't tell our story ourselves, we allow others to tell our story. So even though, it might seem like I'm very vulnerable, I still get to tell my story the way that it is and true to myself."

BOXES: How is the music industry treating you?

Sakinah: "The industry has their cliques. They don't really recognize us because we've only been on social media for the last two years, even though we've been making music for our whole life. They tried to discredit our ability to create and speak, because of our age and experience. That's why we keep our age private."

Zakiyyah: "We're also not taken seriously or not being valued the same way. Some offer us



LEFT: ZAKIYYAH, RIGHT: SAKINAH

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Aint The Twinsz Afraid

Want to know more about racism? Go to [page 51](#) to discover a podcast on this topic.

lower prices than they do to other artists. Basically, it's because we're new on the scene, people are still growing their..."

Together: "Respect!" (both laugh)

BOXES: With everything happening in the world, how can people be tolerant of each other?

Zakiyyah: "Listening! That is so important. There have been moments when people embrace us beautifully by listening to our story and asking questions to further understand."

Sakinah: "Yeah, don't listen to debate, undermine or invalidate."

Zakiyyah: "If someone generalises an entire community based off of one incident, you could

reply to them with: 'I'm sorry that happened to you. I want you to know that there are millions of people like me who don't believe in doing things like that.'

BOXES: That way we connect to others.

Zakiyyah: "Yes, you should seek spaces to learn. If you are always surrounded by people like you, there is no true diversity. Make it your journey to find out more about the world. By travelling, having conversations or even going on TikTok! Just scroll down and you learn so much about different communities."

BOXES: Final message for our teens?

Sakinah: "Be unapologetic and know that you are valuable. Even

though young people are looked down upon, your voice can still be heard so you need to speak up. Social media have given us the power to share our voices or find and create our communities online. Even if you 'only' have 200 followers, a lot of people are listening. **Zakiyyah:** Start now. I wish I had more confidence when I was younger to pursue my dreams sooner. I'm still young today, so I would say: 'Be aint afraid.'

LISTEN TO AINT AFRAID'S
MUSIC ON YOUTUBE BY
SCANNING THE QR-CODE.



SCAN ME

NEXT IN BOXES

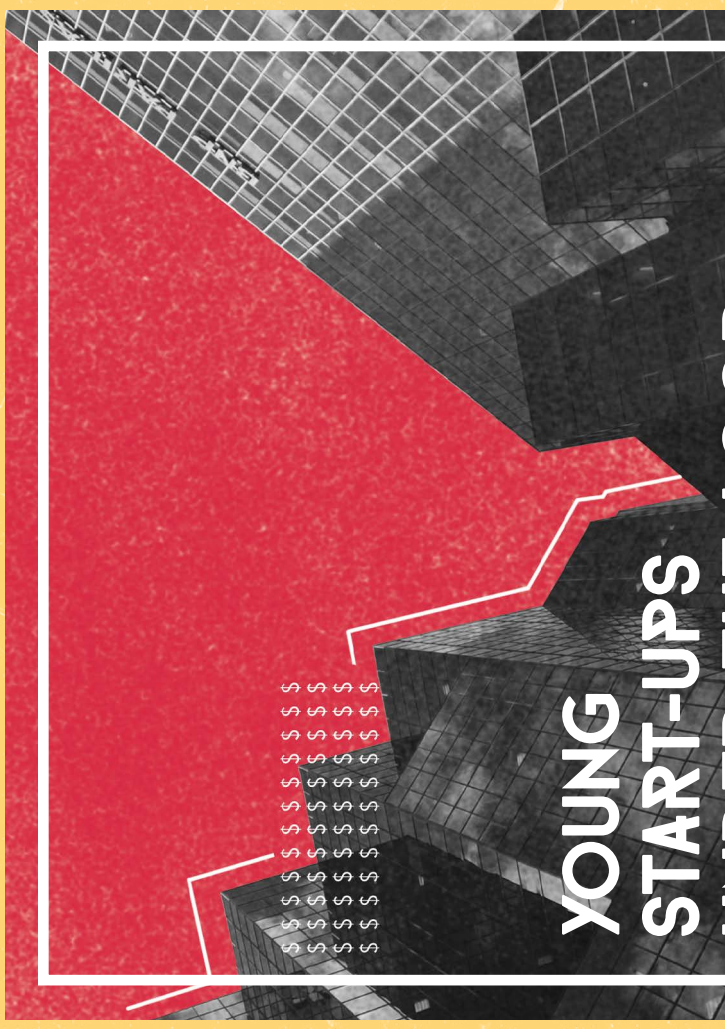


THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT

SEXTING, SENDING SEXY PHOTOS OF YOURSELF, ISN'T ALWAYS WITHOUT RISKS. THE BIGGEST BELGIAN TELECOMPANY, TELENET, MADE A 'DIGITAL CONDOM', AN APP CALLED .COMDOM TO MAKE SEXTING SAFE. BUT HOW DOES IT WORK? AND IS IT ACTUALLY SAFE TO USE?

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THIS OR THAT:
CLIMATE CHANGE
ACTIVIST
US CLIMATE CHANGE DENIER

SOMETIMES IT IS HARD IMAGINING WHY SOMEONE ELSE WOULDN'T CARE ABOUT THE CLIMATE, WHEN YOU DO. CAN A CLIMATE ACTIVIST AND DENIER FIND MIDDLE GROUND? CAN THEY SEE PAST THE PREJUDICES THEY HAVE ABOUT EACH OTHER?



MICHELLE OBAMA

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